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**Re-covering/re-membering the fundamental elements of love:
Black women's wellness in the African Diaspora**

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**Re-covering/re-membering the fundamental elements of love:
Black women's wellness in the African Diaspora**

by

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Thesis

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Dedication

Mama mama mi, mama baba mi, monifere.

To my grandmothers, Arlene and O'Lola' Ade.

To my ancestors.

To Black Women of the African Diaspora.

To the air, water, earth and fire that keep us together.

To galaxies of future possibilities.

Love, light and Axé.

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Abstract

Re-covering/re-membering the fundamental elements of love: Black women's wellness in the African Diaspora

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This thesis project imagines future possibilities of humanity for Black women of the African Diaspora. It provides a lay of the land of decolonial projects in Latin American and Information Studies, suggesting alternative directions, strategies and methods for the work. These directions are guided by the knowledges of my ancestors. Using a spiritual-cosmological-pedagogical approach to ground endogenous epistemologies of Black Women in the African Diaspora, *the fundamental elements of love* connect us back to the essences of nature, so that we may move into alignment and find balance. This thesis imagines future possibilities for Black women that help us to save our own lives and live well.

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THE LAY OF THE LAND

The contours of our Planet

WHY THIS PROJECT: ENTERING THE DUAL DEGREE

In the fall of 2014, I moved to Austin, Texas to pursue dual master's degrees in Latin American Studies and Information Studies. The University of Texas dual degree program "offers students the opportunity to combine specialized study to understand people and their interactions with information, such as how people utilize information, how we can improve access to information, ways in which information is organized and stored, and the relationships between information and identity, and to contribute to knowledge and understanding of Latin America, its characteristics and how they manifest, through education, research, and exchange" ("LLILAS Dual Degree Programs," 2016). Exchange is a large part of my education as a Black woman, and key to understanding Black women and their interactions with information in the African Diaspora.

I wanted to put the fields of Latin American Studies and Information Studies in conversation in the hope that their exchange with one another would lead to further educational possibilities. For exchange to happen productively between these two fields, the understanding of how they both deal with information, memory and archive must be addressed. The School of Information describes "information [sic] as the new oil. It is a global resource that requires harvesting, organization, design and delivery. Information science is the field of the age, and those with the requisite skills are in short supply. Our

Masters offers you a pathway to a successful career, now and into the future. Our MSIS degree is an accredited, terminal professional qualification for this new world” (School of Information, 2016). Although the focus of the Information Program is to make pathways to successful careers, we must be critical and careful about how we describe, define and operationalize information. We must expand our definition of memory and potential possibilities for information rooted in experience and in balance with nature.

I agree that information is a global resource, an animate entity of our world, but it does not make demands of humans to be harvested, depleted and controlled. If information is handled such as oil has been handled, our planet is doomed for destruction. There have been a handful of catastrophic oil spills already in my short lifetime, and I do not wish to see the continuation of this toxic process. Information, like oil, does not make demands on humans. Oil does not require harvesting nor does information. Capitalism and colonialism demand a lot of these resources, of oil, of information. If information is a global resource, there are indeed various perspectives on our relation to it by its global nature. These varying perspectives, on how we relate with it and conceptualize it are diverse and specific to our local experiences.

Information in our current global context is mainly thought of as digital because of our increasing reliance and incorporation of digital technologies into our daily routines. To encourage the field of Information Studies in directions other than harvesting, organizing, designing and delivering information, I am providing an elemental model of humanity. In defining a new world that is disconnected from our present and past denies the possibility of simultaneous continuation of worlds with foundational blocks in the past supporting our

present and future. As a queer-cis-Black-woman who considers herself an extension of nature and its offerings, I work to provide a different model for the understanding of information and knowledge. One not founded on colonial, capital, consumptive building blocks, but instead on the experiences of my mind/body/spirit providing a pedagogical tool to guide us toward balance amidst copious information.

Information is a global resource that we must learn to work with by cultivating a healthy sustainable relationship with and understanding of it. We must understand that information is animate, dynamic and independent of our interactions with it. Information extends beyond our grasp but informs the ways we understand and shape the world. It can pass through us and move with us. We can move with it and be guided by it. We can create systems through which to process information for our own purposes, but we must acknowledge that information is an entity that is bigger than one person, bigger than one community, bigger than humanity. Information is embedded in all life, in the material of the Planet Earth, in the stars and galaxies beyond. Information is embedded into the structures and spaces of academia.

I embarked on my journey in graduate school thinking about information as it relates to digital and print technologies and Black women's use of them. I was interested in how Black women use and engage with information in visible ways, as well as how they were using digital and analog tools to build identities for themselves as Black women in Latin America and the African Diaspora. I wanted to know how they were pushing the boundaries and conceptions of blackness through their participation in these spaces.

The space of graduate school relies upon a particular set of tools, movements and

bodily and vocal vocabularies. One tool we use is our choreographed speech about our interests and plans within the field of study. Crafting my speech was challenging because I did not yet know the direction my work would take from here forward. Most responses to my initial utterances were that my ideas would mold and shift as I went. I decided to move about with an openness, allowing the journey to show me the relevant work and allowing it to unfold as I went. I started with mandatory courses in both Latin American Studies and Information Studies laying out the initial parameters of both fields. This foundational coursework left me with many questions as to how both fields were engaging with Blackness specifically with Black women. I felt our conspicuous absence and wanted to engage with Black women's contributions to understandings of our world. I wanted to push the ways in which the fields of Latin American Studies and Information understood, pursued and embodied their interdisciplinary goals.

I want to provide another way by which we understand and process information. An alternative to the way we can conceptualize what it is and how it moves. Information shapes our identities and relationships as well as our understandings of community and self. *Fundamental elements* presents a pedagogical tool rooted in Black spiritual epistemologies of the African Diaspora, re-covering one way in which we can “understand people and their interactions with information...and to contribute to knowledge and understanding of Latin America, its characteristics and how they manifest” (“LLILAS Dual Degree Programs,” 2016). This project contributes to the understanding of Latin America and information by discussing how Black women in the African Diaspora relate to and engage with information to save their lives. I challenge the concept of information

being a resource like oil that requires harvesting by providing a model of information that aligns with information as a resource we work with in balance and not control. Some of the questions I will address in the journey through my process are. What does it look like for information to be a resource from which we learn and do not try to control? What does it look like if we take what we need and leave the rest alone? What if we give back and replenish what we take? What are we giving? How do contributions from Black Brazilian women inform the construction of this pedagogical tool and our understanding of how the world works? What is home? What is love? What does it feel like to love? How and where do we find balance? How do we learn from ourselves?

THE STATE OF THE PLANET EARTH

People live all together on the Planet Earth, revolving around the sun once every three hundred sixty-five days. We are all part of one whole. Over time people have fragmented the planet into smaller and smaller pieces, entering a relationship that separates us from the Earth and further, from one another. Fragmentation is an illusion separating people from nature and one another, and body from mind from spirit. This illusion throws us off balance and messes up our alignment. This fragmentation is shaded.

Split as we are into various shades of unhappiness by the tension between undomesticated being and desire and how we have been socialized to be and want, we are taught to embody, to produce reality as a binary. We live on the crumbling faith act, the historically specific aftereffect of colonization of the Americas and the rationalization of racialized, gendered, and sexy hierarchical orders in post-Enlightenment thought — that we are unrelated, gulfs apart from nature, from other people, even from parts of our own selves, as if our interdependence on all these levels were fantasy, delusion, superstition or the demonic (Pérez, 2014).

Our socialization, synthesizes colonial definitions of measurement and values to produce a binary lived reality that continues enacting intimate violences against people. It teaches us one way of being and knowing that criminalizes difference.

The discourses through which we function and the ordering of the world around us have departed from the natural world, normalizing the idea of human dominance over nature and one another. This active pursuit of dominance creates wars that destruct and kill. If humans want to continue living life on this Planet we must restore balance. Balance within ourselves, with one another and with the Planet. It is up to us to remember what it feels like to be in alignment, what it feels like to love.

Love, axé, life-force. Love is what guides us back into balance. Love is the intangible factor, the glue that holds it all together. Love is the re-clamation of time and space, a re-alignment of our energies. Love inspires re-membering (Alexander, 2005). Love circulates amongst elements around and within us. People have much to learn about the entity and capacity of love from Black women. Love is a “radical self-possession”(Alexander, 2005, p. 281); a possession where we take control of our bodies, our territories, our land; constellating, undulating our imaginations of the world into fruition.

Black women feel the impact and reverberations of the fragmentation of the world like earthquakes in our bones. We feel the impact of the quakes at accelerated rates and in stronger doses than others because of the overlapping oppressions projected on our bodies. We are the ones the warrings kill most. We have been exercising and building strategies since the initial fragmentations of our world. Black women are the ones who have been

navigating chasms and healing wounds in our world since they began to form. Our work is not new; rather it is renewed dependent on the context. Our work is always work-in-progress, we are always theorizing through our movement. Our spirits are active. We use our spirits to do our work, or rather our spirits use us to do their work. We work with them. We help one another find and restore balance to continue moving. The balance we find amongst ourselves and with nature is foundational to healing the Planet. The synchronization of all of ‘humanity to the rest of the natural world is sane, healthy, necessary,’ and is at the heart of a decolonial politics of spirit” (Facio & Lara, 2014). The synchronization beckons us to find our internal rhythms that may clash with the rhythms of the world as it has been constructed and follow them, let them guide us back to balance. Decolonial politics of spirit uses the spirit’s relationship with the body to guide their movement. They do not adhere to imposed colonial standardized epistemologies and knowledges, but re-member their own epistemologies, using the body as the point of reference to orient themselves.

My body is my point of reference. Everyday feels like a fight for survival. I fight to keep going. I fight to be human through the “routine violence shaping our lives” (Crenshaw, 1991). Black people are still continually targeted and ritually extinguished from this routine violence. Amidst the turmoil of violent colonial reverberations palpable in the coup overthrowing President Dilma in Brazil, in the election of President Trump in the United States, among other power imbalances and egregious circumstances, Black genocide continues throughout the Diaspora. Saving Black lives amidst the turmoil is the priority. Imagining decolonial futures to save our Earth.

Colonialism dismembered the Earth. Colonialism fed off the illusion of fragmentation, a conscious, intentional effort designed to kill Black bodies. Colonialism is not singular but rather “different colonialisms operate in different places at the same time, and also in the same place at the same time”(Alexander, 2005, p. 182). The operations of colonialism are detail oriented. The details are not left to chance, as Europeans saw lightening native darkness as the key to success and world domination, they needed a plan to divide and conquer (Chen, 2012). The outcomes of these strategic plans entail the toxification of black bodies. We feel the reverberations of colonialism down to our bones. The successors of the original colonial powers inherit systems that disillusion them to believe that Black is synonymous with toxic. Our shared living spaces do not become toxic because of Black bodies but rather from the projections on them and of them. Hegemonic white patriarchal societies continue to “detoxify” their constructed world by targeting and eliminating Black bodies. Their goal is to “make the world great again” by removing perceived toxins from the environment, rather than acknowledging the true toxins. They perceive Black bodies as toxic, when the environment is polluted by colonial violence and its reverberations. Black bodies process the toxicity bearing the brunt of the violences.

Amidst this toxicity and violence, every day I work to save my own life. We must remember what it feels like to be whole. I focus on how we can practically save our own lives, recovering our humanity by doing the things we love. Piecing things back together and finding balance, focusing on making ourselves healthy and well, allows us to recharge in order to face the world another day. We may not be able to immediately change the ways societies work, or reach the root of a system, but we can take care of ourselves every day

to do the long-term work that is necessary for saving Planet Earth made sick by the disease of *capitalism*. White, patriarchal, heteronormative cis-men, originating in Europe, have injected capital into the veins of our world making us sick on monetary gain. Our bodies learn to synchronize with and feed off capital values. The hegemonic nature of this problem means that it is felt and experienced everywhere. It creates a toxic environment based on the fight over binary zeros and ones we cannot eat (data, meta-data). Our relationship with capital is unhealthy and has come to define the value of bodies. People are dying, people are being killed because their presence is not valued. The sickness of this way of being and knowing manifests in many forms and mutates rapidly, so we must work to protect ourselves, we must save ourselves. This work is community, not only individual work that originates in the natural elements.

Fundamental elements is a pedagogical tool that orients us back to nature, our teacher, and its foundational lesson of balance. Ridding us of the illusion of fragmentation. Taking note of what is going on in our relationship with ourselves, the material around us, other people around us, our environments and nature is essential to the process. In observations of our relationships we notice money is taken for granted as the determinant of a person's value to the greater collective and the most emphasized collection of people is the nation. Capitalist nations have agreed that their borders are solid, and national interests come first. Meditating on *Fundamental elements* helps us to re-cover, re-assign and re-align values with the Earth from which we came. Those who suffer the most from the valuations and illusioned fragmentation of the world are Black women. We are the ones

to feel it first, our life experiences teach us all too well how the sickness manifests. You must hear our voices, our contributions, if the world has any hope of surviving.

Black women know a lot about survival. We are here because of our capacity to survive. Luciane O’Rocha “argues for an approach to African Diaspora as creating, nurturing, resisting, and recuperative acts as an alternative to genocidal practices, which constitutes Black mothering” (Rocha, 2014). How we respond to Black genocide, how we move through spaces and places that support this atrocity, how we move through trauma and support each other in community are my concerns. Black women do not want to contribute to our own deaths. With the approach of creating, nurturing, resisting and recovering, the *fundamental elements* is created from a nurturing place of love. From a moment of our Planet’s history that is pivotal. It imagines a world of future possibilities rooted in our pasts. It is by generating and regenerating life and loving ourselves even when the world does not, that we continue to survive.

DECOLONIZING PROJECTS IN ACADEMIA

Decolonization implies the undoing of systems put in place by colonization. To understand attempts at deconstruction, we must first understand what the inheritances of these hegemonic powers are. When European explorers set out to explore and conquer the world, they brought with them the notion of the superiority of writing. Writing re-organized the world, creating a divide between literate and non-literate people; those of oral tradition and those of literate tradition. It is not to say that there is no overlap between literate and oral traditions, but there were intentional and strategic binary splits imposed by literate

colonizers. When a technology becomes efficient, people tend to co-opt it for the purposes of wielding power. Writing was one such technology. The technology of writing contributed to the illusion of fragmentation, the separation of us from them, human from nature. When literate colonizers encountered oral cultures, they imposed “their superior alphabetic technology applied to the administration of the society which they governed swiftly supplanted the oral mechanism of government with literate practice. The original oral performance with its poetry was stripped of functional purpose and relegated to the secondary role of entertainment, one which it always had but which now became its sole purpose”(Havelock, 1988).

Eric Havelock examines the shift from orality to literacy. He departs from classicists in saying that Western thought is informed by the shift in Greek philosophy from an oral to literate form (Havelock, 1988). Havelock recognizes the extinction of oral traditions, but does not makes moves toward re-covering them. Indigenous and Black folks are gestured toward, but not engaged through his texts that continue to guide scholarship in schools of information.

The imposition of writing as the official and acceptable mode of recorded history, made it the only way through which people could be remembered by official discourse. Writing constituted the archive. Colonizers used violent strategies to wipe out oral, embodied traditions that threatened people’s lives forcing them into submission. Colonially subjected bodies were subject to simultaneous violences and appropriation. Colonizers worked to extinguish the parts of oral cultures they did not appropriate. They standardized the valuation of what it meant to be human making it binary, Black/white like the text on

this page, in opposition and dependence on one another. The imposition of writing as a technology of memory consequently changed the fate of millions of people, summoning them to death toward extinction. Written works comprise most referenced knowledge in Latin American and Information Studies.

Despite Black women's vast knowledges of how trauma manifests in the present moment of the Planet, Black women are left out of the theorizing in Latin American Studies as well as Information Studies as academic fields. Writing and access to it, plays a large role in this active process of knowledge production. Both fields have been built upon Western discourses and processes that privilege the technology of writing and rely upon what has been written down to inform their bodies of knowledge. Academics and scholars reflect the values of a Cartesian mind/body split and an understanding of humans versus nature. A taken for granted notion of the measurement of time and space based on the "Vitruvian Man" standardized a truth, a singular story. There has been a recent move in academic scholarship toward decolonizing these disciplines, however the approaches have been largely unsuccessful. Decolonial conversations have been largely unsuccessful because they are centered on white hegemonic patriarchy that gestures towards Black women but do not include or reach them. They are in such a race for theory that they perpetuate the same systems they set out to dismantle (Christian, 1987). They are motivated by the demands of the accelerated speed of corporate time. Barbara Christian in "The Race for Theory" briefly outlines some of the foundational issues of scholars' attempts at decolonization of scholarship. She,

was told that the minds of the world lived only in the small continent of Europe...[some] writers did announce their dissatisfaction with some of the

cornerstone ideas of their own tradition, a dissatisfaction with which [she] was born. But in their attempt to change the orientation of Western scholarship, they, as usual, concentrated on themselves and were not in the slightest interested in the words they had ignored or controlled. Again [she] was supposed to know *them*, while they were not at all interested in knowing [*her*]. Instead they sought to ‘deconstruct’ the tradition to which they belonged even as they used the same forms, style, language of that tradition, forms which necessarily embody its values (Christian, 1987, p. 56).

The ignored and controlled words of Black women contain vital information for survival. I am interested in knowing more about myself, my sisters and my ancestors. The same process will yield the same results. We must use different forms, styles, and language than is engaged in the traditions of knowledge production in academia. Deconstruction requires innovative methods, interested in knowing the Black woman, embodying her values. We must re-adjust the distribution of our attention economies beyond writing oriented and writing derivative pedagogical practice.

DECOLONIZATION IN INFORMATION STUDIES

Writing and its iterations organize and animate the current world. This version of the world privileges writing as capable of holding memory and distances people from nature. The distance from nature denies the body’s ability to create, hold and transmit information and conduct memory. Information and memory as employed by technologies of writing factor into the conversation of colonization in its connection with the organization, boundary making and animation of the world. Writing draws boundaries around the possibilities of the archive. Colonial implementations of writing decide who can and cannot participate in the making of space and place. If someone is considered

illiterate, they are automatically considered stupid as if they don't know anything since they do not use the technology of writing. Writing is privileged as *The Truth* as *The* way of knowing instead of *a* way of knowing. Oral and literate traditions can and do run concurrently, however the declaration of writing as superior suggests otherwise. We live at a time where documentation of an event is important to its history where documentation of an event is important to its history. If there is no written documentation of an event, it did not happen. Writing is the privileged way of holding onto memory, but it is not the only way. Writing can even be considered artificial memory (Havelock, 1988). Writing support dynamic memory rather than replacing it.

Memory activities such as song/poetry/dance became secondary pushed behind writing during colonization. These activities ceased to be considered functional forms of memory through colonial conquest. The implementation of written alphabetic texts lead to the inanimation of the natural world (Abram, 1996). Abstraction of numbers and words from phenomena of the natural world allowed them to move more freely, and freed up people's mental capacities no longer being used for memorization, for other types of work. These mental capacities got wrapped up in navigating increasingly abstract relations.

The twenty-first century is a time where we trade numbers that move through space. We move numbers around that are no longer connected to material. Money, capital, is an imagined concept that is moving out of the tangible realm. Rarely do people move physical money rather they trade the idea of it mediated by screens and data (zeros and ones). We trade numbers and data, on the belief that it has value. We went from mediation and

exchange with clay, to precious metals, to paper, to plastic, to zeros and ones. We move numbers to signify their value, as opposed to referring to values tied to nature.

Similarly, writing abstracts a voice from a body, separating nature's inherent ties from people. Words could travel far and wide without the library of contextual knowledge that resides in the body from which they came. The use of writing technologies in the circulation of origin stories in works like the bible, assisted in the distancing of humans from nature. It pitted humans versus natures rather than seeing people as a part of and working with nature. If humans see themselves as against nature, they constantly try to control it and their place on it. They constantly try to control space and other people to guarantee their own security. Black women relate to ourselves through imagined futures. The imagination is not credited for having power or function when Black women engage it, but ideas created in white-cis men's' imagination have come to shape dominant Western understandings of our world.

The field of Information Studies would benefit from sustained engagement with the experience and imagination of Black women. Most of the field's scholarship and inquiries are into literate systems and processes based in writing practices. The shape of consciousness and organization of tools and strategies assumes a literacy that is based in a phonetic alphabetic. The shape of memory built on these foundations and taken for granted written recorded memory. This construction of archive excludes and invisibilizes other ways of knowing the world. The standards employed in information spheres stem from white-patriarchal-heteronormative-hegemonic measurements that have been normalized as Truth. These standards continue to animate the direction and growth of the field on violent

foundations of erasure. The erasure of Black women and our knowledges makes having relevant, productive conversations more challenging. Black women continue to maneuver according to the projections on our lives, simultaneously holding onto our own truths.

The tools driven nature of Information studies overshadows the nature of the tools. Information is increasingly seen to live in the digital realm built on the same foundations of older technologies like print. We move from writing on paper to writing on screens, yet the issues persist. The proliferations of the same problems in analog have moved to digital with little critique and resistance. Having material things and having tools is preferred to not having them, so we move forward using the same systems as a foundation to move forward, to race for theory.

One area of information studies where the debate of tools versus critical analysis emerges is within digital humanities or informatics in humanities. Scholars have launched critiques of the whiteness of digital humanities, and the lack of the field's engagement with Black humanities. Black women's knowledges are not legible by the systems created to record memory. We re-member (in) our bodies. Our knowledges are passed down through body to body energetic connection, from mouth to ear, through stories, through dance, through energy exchange, not through writing alone. If memory is confined to that which is recorded through writing systems, Black women are seen to have limited memory and therefore limited knowledge. We also write, but if we are not in academia or published, we are forgotten. Both our written and unwritten theorizations are absent. Gatekeepers regulate the space of memory in academia and archives, deciding what is and who is worth remembering.

Memory and knowledges are not all held in one place but rather are collective; Mojuba, or expansive memory, incapable of being held in one place at one time (Alexander, 2005; Smith, 2016). Mojuba should influence the shape and limits of the archive. If an individual cannot hold all memory or all knowledge, that suggests the need for community and networks that constitute constellations working toward fuller remembering and re-collections. This fuller understanding of memory, modeled off diasporic concepts of being are examples of what interdisciplinary work should look like. Just as a library's collection is ever growing, so are the constellations that constitute life. Our bodies are our libraries, in constant collection and circulation. Mojuba is a more spiritual activation, activity of memory (Alexander, 2005, p. 287). Black women's memory activities constitute epistemologies of information based in spiritual-cosmological understanding of the world. Spiritual-cosmological understanding of the world rely on guidance and rooted modes of teaching. Pedagogical practice is important to the passing of Black women's knowledges. The *Fundamental elements* offers a model from which Information Studies can begin to engage Black women and their relationships with information.

Writing suggests an exogenous understanding and organization of the world, one in relation to material and society. Black women's knowledges contain components of endogenous understandings of time and space, ones held in our bodies. Our spirits write with different technologies. "Traced in us and by us is a different alphabet, markings between and beyond the social text of dominant, dominating orders: a spirit writing" (Pérez, 2014, p. 24) Taking cue from ancestral spiritual practices, endogenous

understandings of our relationships with nature that write through the medium of the body is important for decolonial movement in the field of information.

Information Studies like other interdisciplinary fields, gets caught up in the challenges of navigating how its practices and processes are defined (Risam, 2016). The systems in place reflect white hegemonic understandings of humanity, failing to capture the experiences and realities of Black women. We continue illegible to the system, erased and excluded. In response to white digital humanities, “Black digital humanities, then, might be defined as a digital episteme of humanity that is less [digital] tool-oriented and more invested in anatomizing the digital as both progenitor of and host to new – albeit related – forms of racialization. These forms at once attempt to abolish and to fortify a taxonomy of humanity predicated on racial hierarchies” (Gallon, 2016). The use of digital technologies widens existing gaps between people. To move in digital space, we must be able to move in lived space, for they are connected and reflective of one another.

Approaching the study of information in a diasporic context “requires reflection on the plurality of circumstances that inflect local practices. This is not only a matter of tools but also one of method,” where practice meets theory (Risam, 2016). Many factors influence life practices at the local level. These factors multiply with distance. Local practices dissipate when the scholarship constituting the field reflect only the anglo-Global North (U.S., Canada, U.K.). “Just as Christian raised concerns over the ways that theory centered the heirs of European philosophy, relegating the rest of the world to the peripheries, so too, it seems, the centers of digital humanities produce their own margins” (Risam, 2016). The informatics of the humanities help can speak to and hear those who

have been relegated to the peripheries. “The task of Black feminism then, is, in part, to bring these historical figures from the margins back onto the pages of her story” (Smith, 2016). This task of re-recovery depends on strategies passed down through bodies. It requires expanding the definition of tools, methods and models different from those engaged by the field.

There is an imperative here to move from a logic that centers the Global North – advanced industrial and high-income economies—in digital humanities toward embracing the diversity of practices around the world and the intersecting forces that shape them. This instance recalls Christian’s parallels between the race for theory within the academy with the colonial race for Africa, the systematic colonization of the continent by European power in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She imagines the world of literary studies being similarly overrun with continental philosophy, prescribing ways of reading for Africana literature that originate in methodologies derived from theory, not from within the African Diaspora itself (Risam, 2016).

The race for theory, and the prescribed ways of reading, extends beyond literature and literary studies to information models, tools and systems. When information systems are overrun with continental philosophies and built with the same methodologies that erase Black women, the systems erase Black women as well. They cannot hear us; we are not legible, not audible to them. If we use methodologies and pedagogies derived from the Diaspora and the crossing themselves rather than what has been standardized by the fields of study, we will reach solutions more relevant and practical for Black women. We will construct epistemologies in which we are present and legible.

Scholarly focus on exogenous, existing systems and tools actively erase any other understandings of the construction of space and time. Barbara Christian’s “A Race For Theory” more specifically points to the varying manifestations of power in institutional

practice. Critical approaches [Marxist, postcolonial and decolonial] “are not only situated in continental philosophy but also are nonspecific, taking as their basis not the historical specificity of women of the African Diaspora but the broader issues of how power operates discursively” (Risam, 2016). This obscuration of power makes it difficult for Black women to articulate themselves in their own language, suffocating creativity and truth. The focus on abstracting power, diffusing it into the space around us makes it more challenging to find one solution. Black women’s endogenous understandings of the world are not legible by the systems built in institutions of information. We must start where we are and build from there, articulating our own perspective on experiences with power.

In the local continental narratives, writing as the privileged system has assisted in the spectaclization and objectification of Black women, for the purposes of entertainment. Black women have been objectified, through the power of language via writing. Our knowledges and ways of being are pushed to secondary positions. Black women have been pushed outside of official knowledge production along with elements of oral traditions we carry. These traditions have been deemed non-functional through the assertion of written memory. Our knowledges are not received or regarded as functional. The grammars of written language require a subject to take action via a verb on an object and when Black women are placed in the position of object, we can never take action through the verb. Inverting this grammar and re-claiming subjectivity, allows for our actions to be seen. The subjectivities take on many forms depending on local forces in action¹. Local forces in

¹ This arrangement of ideas about grammar, the body and subjectivity came out of personal conversation with Lyn Wiltshire.

action, resonate in other locations. Many imperial languages swept through and dominated the world.

To learn methodologies from the African Diaspora, we must expand our search beyond the boundaries of the English language. English has been the primary language of publishing and citation in the field of Information. The authors themselves are likewise from the Global North. The overrepresentation of the English language allows for the influence on scholarly productions, that continue “marginalizing people of color in general and Black women in particular” (Risam, 2016, and Smith, 2016). The conversations in information must engage with Black women in other locations to gain local specificity and integrity. Ananya Chatterjea, a contemporary Indian dancer, scholar, professor and founder/artistic director of Ananya Dance Theater,

believes dancing, dance images, working through metaphor and heightened energy, invites audiences in to map world that are as yet unborn. It creates space for reflecting about how we are implicated in the large global forces through our everyday local actions. Dancing also generates actions that can support our life affirming relationship to our ecosystem (Chatterjea, 2014).

The influence on the process of re-membering methodologies of survival must come from and move through other places to be diasporic. We must all understand how our everyday local actions connect to larger global forces through our ecosystems. These relationships are processes.

The process is where meaning is made, not just in the product. Violent processes by “which nonwhite subjects are systematically shut out from the ‘category of human as it is performed in the modern west’” are the processes that infiltrate everyday social interaction (Gallon, 2016). Humanity on its “modern” terms cannot be separated from

racialized hegemony. We must be wary of these systemic processes that reinforce a singular racialized-gendered understanding of humanity. To re-cover other understanding of humanity, we must use other technologies in addition to writing. Writing can be one of, but cannot be the only medium with which we work. Technologies of re-recovery are those that consider other perspective and other stories (Gallon, 2016). Writing can be dangerous and useful for the same reasons that it moves quickly across time and space, maintaining a voice disconnected from the body.

As I will discuss more later, the notion of humanity that developed out of racializing systems is one based in capital production and consumption. When the idea of a human is subjected to monetary production values, it gets operationalized vis-à-vis language and action that nullifies and erases other possibilities of what it means to be human. Capital humanity suffocates the globe. When people cannot breathe they die. Black people in the current world climate cannot breathe, they are being, suffocated; killed.

Technologies of re-recovery and re-cupuration use tools non-traditional to Western epistemologies. These technologies include mouth-to-ear passing of knowledge, exchange of energies, oral traditions of storytelling, poetry and music, and dance amongst others. Black information constellations are constructed body to body with the assistance of these technologies. Re-recovery depends upon a coming together of body, mind and spirit. A re-calibration to our natural state. A resonance of love at our core. The imagination is one of our most powerful technologies of recovery and reconstruction. We construct alternative futures in which we are alive. In information, the “Black digital humanities troubles the very core of what we have come to know as the *humanities* by recovering alternate

constructions of humanity that have been historically excluded from that concept” (Gallon, 2016). Shaking up the core of the field means re-covering knowledges of humanity. It means re-memembering alternate constructions that have been excluded, bringing them to the forefront of the conversation, using our imaginations to assist in this process.

These alternate constructions, rub up against persisting concepts of human value and existence that have been taken for granted, standardized. The very discussion of these tools and processes implicate the problematic discussions, urging them to be self-critical. Re-covering other humanities, means learning how to take care of ourselves as Black people, as Black women. The efforts to re-cover the humanity of Black authors, not just their texts is a core of motivation of Black feminist information scholarship (Gallon, 2016). This recovery is a process that must extend beyond traditional institutional archives because “Black women’s written thoughts are often hidden away on scraps of paper in closets and garages, or on old computers—in the world but not accessible to the broader public” (Smith, 2016). The process of re-covery requires us to reconsider where memory is held, where the archive draws its boundaries and where and how we push back on them. Black people are working to recover our histories and humanities inside and outside of academia, engaging with digital and non-digital tools and strategies alike.

The re-covery of our memories requires connection building amongst people. Recovery is people based, we draw from our constellations. Information and Latin American Studies meet in Black women’s Diasporic memories. In memories of Mojuba, where the possibilities of the archive extend beyond the museum walls. Current operationalizations

of archives reflect practices that actively erase difference. Black women are rarely if ever a part of the conversation. Black women are also often the ones doing the work of recovery.

Rachel Winston, the Black Diaspora Archivist of the Benson Latin American collection, emphasizes a view of Diaspora that engages the archive as a tool for activism in an approachable and contextualized way (Winston, 2015). Winston works to re-cover the Black voices from the depths of the Latin American Studies and Black Diaspora archives. She actively re-covers and acquisitions materials and knowledges from within the collections of LLILAS Benson as well as draws them in from other places. She contextualizes her findings by weaving their local specific stories into a larger Diasporic narrative. Winston navigates these materials with a conscientious lens, practicing a version of archival work that makes Black women's voices legible and audible.

Winston's work is one way in which we see the work of re-covery practiced. Latin American Studies and Information Studies alike can take direction from Winston's work to help revise tools and methods applied to archives and memory. Black women working in the Diaspora with intention to build Diaspora that is legible to and for Black women are our guides, our teachers. Like Winston they are the ones demonstrating the possibilities for the future of memory and archives.

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

As demonstrated by Winston's work, Latin American and Information Studies are intricately tied. Re-covery is necessary in Latin American Studies and Information Studies alike. Working in both fields, I have experienced that they

seldom [*sic*] note [the] distinctions [assemblages of identity,] because if they did they could not articulate a theory. Often as a way of clearing themselves they acknowledge that women of color, for example, do exist, then go on to do what they were going to do anyway, which is to invent a theory that has little relevance for us (Christian, 1987, p. 59).

Theory with the absence of embodied practice has little relevance to Black women. We theorize in our daily movements, with each step we take.

The daily movements of Black women depend on local influential entities. Black women's movements in the African Diaspora relate to one another in some respects, as they have been restricted by simultaneous colonialisms. With further articulation and specification of our experiences, our differences are illuminated and celebrated. Our differences, help us learn about the ways colonial hegemonies impact our daily lives, in multiple places, at the same time. When we re-construct the larger picture, weaved into a larger narrative, we are able to imagine future possibilities grounded in our past, sans-borders. The larger narrative relies on bodily specificity that is missing in the articulated theories and goals of Latin American and Information Studies. Attempts at decolonial projects in Latin American Studies like in Information Studies employ tools and methods derived from the very work it attempts to deconstruct.

I cannot hear my sisters in the Diaspora through all the white noise from here in the United States. Anibal Quijano, one of the main scholars of decolonial Latin American studies, agrees that “one of the keys to understand the character, the place and role of Latin America in the global world, is the sort of permanent dissociation, often conflictive, between our predominant cognitive perspective and our experience. In other words, between the Eurocentrist perspective of knowledge and the specific history of Latin

America (Quijano, 2000, p. 215). Cognitive perspective is linked with Europe and experience is linked with specific history of Latin America. The specific foundations of experiential Black knowledges are gestured toward but not made explicit. Quijano assumes here still that there is a singular specific history of Latin America rather than multiple simultaneous histories. The *Fundamental elements* project complicate the erasure of Black women's ongoing decolonial practices, re-surfacing concepts from the depths of Black Women's Diasporic memory.

Quijano, acknowledges that race and racism is present and persistent in everyday interactions throughout the world. This presence is how colonial power is felt and transmitted. The power expressed in social interactions are based on the idea of "*homo oeconomicus*," capitalism and individualism for gain. Quijano misses in his analysis, the "rationally illogical" sentient pieces of explanation and understanding. Blackness was created in opposition to whiteness to operationalize and justify capital systems. This difference with similar roots took different routes through the Diaspora, but always created an "us" and a "them" based on local versions of colonialisms.

Quijano sets out to address the disconnect between the "cognitive perspective and our experience," pointing out the disconnect between a "eurocentrist perspective of knowledge and the specific history of Latin America"(Quijano, 2000, p. 215). He notes that the issue with those in the discussion is they try to "understand and enact that experience precisely from a Eurocentric perspective" (Quijano, 2000, p. 215). He describes a global system built on capital power based in racial social relations, not specifying any other determining factors of power such as gender and sexuality amongst others. Quijano

explains the use of slavery for explicit capital gain, the founding relationship of Black people with white people globally, without referencing a single Black woman. Quijano harkens “back to the masterpieces of the past, again reifying the very texts [he] said [he was] deconstructing” (Christian, 1987, p. 56). He gestures towards Black women without including them. In Barbara Christian’s words, he develops a theory that is not relevant to us as Black women.

Quijano’s conclusion in his 2000 article pronounces that “it is now high time to learn how to become free from our distorting mirror” (Quijano, p. 231). This pronouncement erases Black women’s engagement with decolonial ways of being in the world from the time of their enslavement. Black women in the African Diaspora have always been freeing themselves, navigating amongst distorted images and reflections. Black visionary women such as Beatriz Nascimento “encouraged us to re-imagine the meaning of Blackness, belonging and the Black Atlantic from a radical, Black female, transnational perspective as early as the 1970s, nearly two decades before Paul Gilroy published *The Black Atlantic* (1993)” and three decades before Quijano’s contributions to decolonial theory (Smith, 2016). Black women can re-imagine ourselves in the future, and thus we manifest in our own stride. By failing to engage in conversation with Black women in Latin America, Quijano’s theory lacks relevance for Black women.

To be relevant to Black women, we must interrogate the tools used by the field of Latin American studies. Latin American studies like Information studies privileges writing as the supreme memory source and storage technology. When we continue with the methods and “tools of the master’s house” we replicate the same scenario (Lorde, 1984;

Taylor, 2003). As Latin American studies reckons with the digital along with the humanities, it is forced to examine the relevance of its tools. It must “first consider how the very foundation of the humanities are racialized through the privileging of Western cultural traditions. It then asks us to assess whether those tools would still be used in the same manner had they been developed to explore the texts that were and are marginalized through the racialization of the humanities. It further prompts us to ask how tool building might mirror the material realities of Blackness” (Gallon, 2016). Critically returning to the nature of tools and what they were conceived to do, and how they build realities, opens up the opportunity to construct other realities.

Black people’s histories require a different tool building process based on our material realities; our corporeal realities. Putting of the informatics in the humanities in conversations with Latin American studies provides generative opportunity to suggest tools that address corporeal realities. The process of building these tools includes using non-Western-written-literate methods. Institutional tools have never been able to hear Black women; they still do not in the digital context. Acknowledging and learning from the process and methods, shifts our attention economies toward grounding understandings of humanity.

Black feminisms have pointed us to think about intersectionality and assemblages in identity as they relate to systems of power. Writing exerted by institutions as a technology of power, overwrites and erases Black women and their ways of knowing. Black feminisms begin to re-direct us toward aligning with and embodying Black women’s experiential epistemologies.

BLACK FEMINISMS

Black feminisms' work to bring Black women's stories back from the margins, illuminates the necessity for the consideration of intersectional experiences in theorizations of the world (Smith, 2016). Regardless of where we stand, "Black women across the Americas exist in a state of precarity. We are 'always standing on the precipice of the social world; teetering on the edge of invisibility, dis-ease and insanity, triply affected by gender/sexuality, race, and class. As a result, our contributions to society typically go unremarked'" (Smith, 2016). Our contributions to the world are what saves our lives, what holds us together. Many Black feminists and proto-feminists have grappled with the concept of what it means to be human, what it means to love (Smith, 2016). The humanity Black women imagine, does not align with the idea of humanity active in our experiences. The humanity active in our everyday experience is the standardized definition steeped in white-patriarchal-hegemony. Our conceptual frame of "human" is steeped in this very hegemony.

Sylvia Wynter pursues a decolonial, cognitive shift, in which she questions the usefulness of "post" conceptual frames for humanity (W. D. Mignolo, 2011, p. 106). She "powerfully explores the roots of Western and colonial knowledge systems and uncovers the otherwise veiled link between racial, gendered, and sexual belonging, differential ways of knowing and imagining the world, and the overarching governing codes that have created, maintained and, normalized practice of exclusion" (W. D. Mignolo, 2011, p. 106). She interrogates the theories that are the "heirs of European philosophies" in order to dismantle their inherited standardization (Gallon, 2016). She "seeks to undo the systems

through which knowledge and knowing are constituted,” and I focus in on pedagogies of humanity that are based in spiritual epistemologies and origin stories to fill in some of the clearance (W. D. Mignolo, 2011, p. 106). The concept of Human steeped in white European philosophy imposed and spread strongly with the advent of writing can be shifted toward the understanding of humanity re-covered from the depths. Writing has strong repercussions on how we relate to one another as people. Nation-states have employed writing as a technology of power. Accepting the definitions of human employed by nation-states, we miss many other stories of humanity. The goal of re-covery is to re-member the functional role Black women’s knowledges play in the day-to-day. How they bring us toward alignment.

Human in its Western conception, originates in renaissance with man1, when Europeans began to travel overseas to other lands, asserting and recording other histories from their point of view. They implemented the powerful technology of writing’s value over others’ technologies. Man1 is also known as *homo politicus* or the rational political subject. Later, this shifts to man2, *homo oeconomicus*, or the capital subject (Wynter, 2004). Both man1 and man2 link the idea of man with Human, actively erasing the possibility of any other conception of humanity. The standardization of this white-patriarchal-Christian-heteronormative-hegemonic definition of human, disqualifies Black people from the possibility of humanity. Black women are not considered human by either of these conceptions, therefore where do we look for our humanity? These conceptions police the boundaries of our daily movements, toxifying our air and transmitting the message that Black women are not human and have no value as such.

In the toxic environment of global capitalism,

we presently live in a moment where the human is understood as a purely biological mechanism that is subordinated to a teleological economic script that governs our global well-being/ill-being – a script, therefore, whose macro-origin story calcifies the *hero figure of homo oeconomicus* whose practices, indeed normalizes, accumulation in the name of (economic) freedom. Capital is thus projected as the indispensable, empirical, and metaphysical source of all human life, thus semantically activating the neurochemistry of our brain's opiate reward/punishment system to act accordingly! (Wynter & McKittrick, 2014, p. 10)

Sylvia Wynter succinctly breaks down the most current iteration of valuation of human bodies. Capital production is the motivation behind our current iteration of human existence. She says we live at a time where the human body is treated as a machine that moves forward in time, steered by money. Money determines how well each individual does in the world. This conception of humanity suggests people should accumulate material and money in order to be free. Monetary capital and consumption, centrally tied to the human body, becomes the social capital through which people relate to one another. Money becomes the life source for the individual. This life source is tied to the body through our brain's motivational system. Our brain sends reward/punishment signals that are dependent on our relationship with money. If our bodies are responding to money at an unconscious level, it is because this idea has been repeated over a period of time; long enough to become internalized.

The internalization of capital product as the main motivator for human existence conflicts with endogenous understanding of time, space and purpose, where our basic needs are our main motivators. When lack of money comes in the way of basic daily function, people die. Money comes in the way of Black women's ability to carry out basic functions of living, killing us at an accelerated rate globally. This acceleration is sustained by external

reminders as well as internalized ones. The internalization of rhetoric, writing and values that keep money at the center serve as a catalyst for this process. We unwantingly contribute to our own deaths. This is where we must question

how we labor and how we build community. The labor of dancing is non-productive, right? It produces no one material thing that [sic] dancers and audience, can take away at the end of the performance. No, rather the labor of dancing demands that we show up every day to train, to rehearse, to perform, to aspire towards an image of perfection that we can only imagine and that will dissolve the moment we accomplish it onstage, reminding us of our tremendous energetic potential and generating [sic] call aunch, heat or desire. That which is heated moves, rises (Chatterjea, 2014).

When we think of what production not as material product but rather an exchange or shift of energy, our potentials for life expand. There is much more to life than money.

Money circles around the white phallus, so we are supposed to as well. We are taught to hate ourselves through our daily social interactions and media encounters. The messages we receive tell us we are ugly, lazy and incapable. Even when we know this is false, our cellular responses to money have conditioned us to continue a path of self-destruction. Stuck in this one conception of humanity, Black women are made to twist and bend into this mold for which they were never meant and never will fit.

In order to re-imagine Black women's geographies in the Diaspora, we must understand Black women's endogenous conceptions of time and space in relation to dominate geographies at a local level. To explore these relationships, *Demonic Grounds* "draws creative, conceptual, and material geographies from Canada, the United States and the Caribbean" (McKittrick, 2006, p. x). McKittrick's discussions are helpful to imagining possible futures of Black women, but are anglo-centered from the global north. The de-

centering of anglo-speaking experiences must be part of the reformulation of humanity within Information and Latin American studies.

Black feminisms lend a helpful hand in critiquing decolonial theory, however Black feminisms largely reify an anglo-imperialism by not imagining the southern Americas to be a continuous extension of the Black experience. “Within the reality of the Americas, Black women from Latin America are more marginalized than their English-speaking counterparts. Afro- Latin American women’s intellectual contributions are all but invisible to those who are not familiar with Black feminism in Latin America” (Smith, 2016). Largely English speaking Black feminist scholars from the U.S., Canada, the U.K. and the Caribbean are known, referenced and cited in the field. Their works and concepts flood the African Diaspora with knowledge positioned from place, meant to represent the Diaspora in its entirety, when it is only a portion. Black women intellectuals from the global south are rarely engaged. When we re-imagine the Black Diaspora and Black feminisms using a lens from the global south, we gain robust insight into other conceptions and possibilities of humanity.

Black women’s knowledges continue to grow by their own terms, despite active erasure, “for people of color have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking” (Christian, 1987, p. 52). This theorizing is an ongoing

cyclical process from which we constantly learn and grow through exploration, finding new and renewed ways of teaching ourselves (Christian, 1987, p. 57).

BLACK WOMEN IN DIASPORA

Black women use our stories as teaching tools. Written history runs the danger of standardizing a single story. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns us of this danger that takes away our ability to understand things wholly and from multiple perspectives (2009). Wynter opens up a space that allows for the exploration of perspectives where humans are inherently storytellers writing our own stories into existence.

Macro-origin stories are overrepresented as the singular narrative through which the stakes of human freedom are articulated and marked. Our contemporary moment thus demands a normalized origin narrative of survival-through-ever-increasing-process-of-consumption-and-accumulation (McKittrick, 2014, p. 10).

The macro-origin stories that inform a relationship to one another through capital, are hyper-circulated globally. Deployed through media and social discourse, this single story is dangerous and poisonous. In small quantities, capitalism like any other substance can be ok, but when employed as the singular conception of humanity, made indispensable and infinite, it kills those most vulnerable. The parameters of humanity have been established using cis-white-men's measurements steeped in Christianity. The Judeo-Christian origin story says that man received complete writing (in the form of the ten-commandments) suggested their superiority over nature. This founding blocks of superiority to nature as a part of human existence extend globally beyond national borders, affecting the African Diaspora at large.

The parameters of Black women's lives have origins rooted in endogenous understandings of space and time different from colonial systems. Wynter's tactful unravelings make way in the airspace to recover our theories and breathe them back to life. We recover by tracings roots to their origin. One set of roots leads us to Black women scholars of Brazil. Beatriz Nascimento offers us an account of understanding the world through Black embodied experience. Discussions of decolonial projects to this point have "changed the content but not the terms of the conversation, and maintained the very idea of the state within a global capitalist economy" (W. Mignolo, 2011, p. 50). Lack of critical attention to the terms of inclusion/exclusion maintains the position of Black women outside of the conversation of humanity. If we continue to be objects, it does not matter how much we speak, for we are still not heard nor have action as subjects.

Concurrent conversations of humanity in Afro-descendent spiritual traditions are fruitful places to engage action points for change. Mignolo calls for embodied perspectives of knowledge production, asking questions that Black women such as Beatriz Nascimento had already been theorizing about in the 1970s. Her film *Órí*, discusses the body as land, the body as territory, the body as a document, the body as the physical manifestation of *axé*. She theorizes the body through quilombo, as the practice of the search for self, for refuge. Nascimento theorizes on the concept of quilombo as home. This idea of quilombo, is that the body is our territory. We are extensions of the land, we are moving breathing, conscious land. From the land we rise, back to the land we return. She finds home by "negotiating her body as a spiritual medium. Her body now serves as a site of home where

she has incorporated a fluidity of revolutionary and spiritual love into her life essence” (Facio & Lara, 2014, p. 20).

Spiritual conceptions of time, place and space from religious practices such as Candomblé in Brazil, provide a perspective from which we can conceptualize the African Diaspora and its relation to Information and Latin American Studies. The understanding of time and space take on a different shape from those constructed through colonization.

Speaking with the voices who have been talking and producing knowledge for a long time helps to amplify and strengthen the critique of technologies, tools, methods and systems of these two fields. Beatriz Nascimento, Jurema Werneck, Luciane O’Rocha amongst other Black women from Brazil provide pieces of a pedagogical spiritual cosmological approach to recovering humanity.

RECOVERING ANCESTRAL/SPIRITUAL/COSMOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF TIME/SPACE/HUMAN

As previously mentioned, the measurement of the human in constructions of time and space are widely understood by the well-known image of Leonardo DaVinci’s “Vitruvian man.” This figure represents man’s ideal geometric proportions, based in Greco-Roman conceptions of the time and space. Greek philosophy again takes precedence in setting standards of being. This figure visually represents the centering of the cis-white-male body as the standard measurement of the world. From this ideal, man-as-human normalized understandings of world order and how we employ measurements of time and space. The violent implementation of this standard erased any other notions of time and

space, including spiritual ones. The Cartesian plane and the mind/body split that accompanied, controlled conceptions of time and space.

Descartes was not the inventor of the image widely recognized as the Cartesian plane (Figure 1).

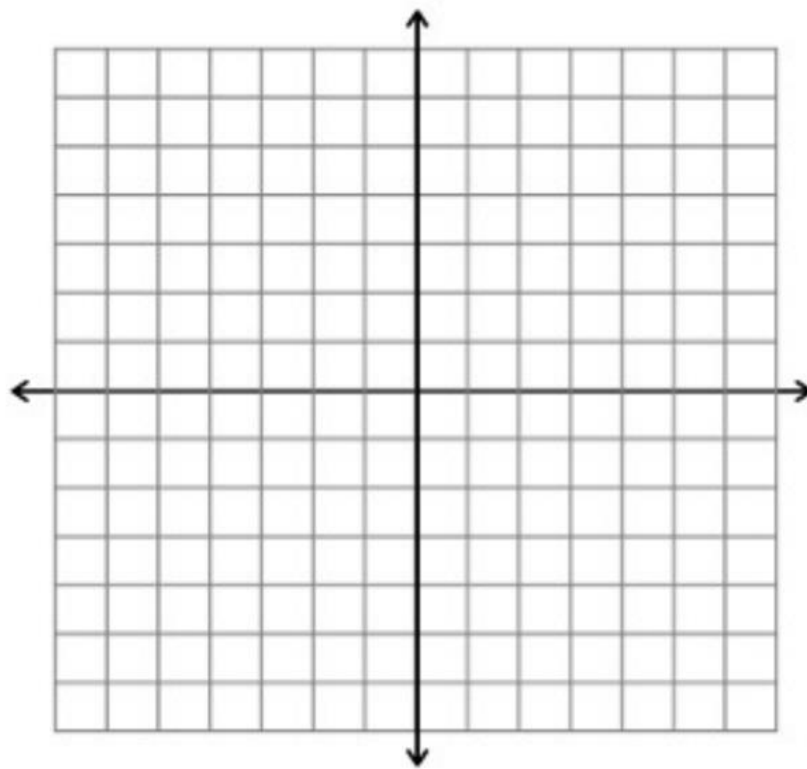


Figure 1: Cartesian Plane

There are various iterations on the image of circle with arrow dissecting the center. Such images surface in many indigenous and Afro-descendent spiritual practices. These figures communicate conceptions of space and time that lay out the connections of the worlds. One

such model can be found with the Kongo people (Thompson, 2010). Their traditions offer a variation on a similar circular image with two sets of dissecting arrows. They understand the meaning of the symbol in a different way. Their model is not a flattening or narrowing of space and time, but rather a deepening and expansion. The four sectors created by the Kongo imagery represent the elements for the foundation of understanding human relation to time and space. The past, present and future co-exist simultaneously. These expressions of elemental, balance relations with the world are enacted concurrent to Cartesian implementations even pre-dating them, but have been erased due to the normalization of Cartesian plane measurement. The expansive conceptions of elemental connection live in spiritual practices of the African Diaspora such as Yoruba tradition of Ifá of Nigeria and Candomblé of Brazil to name a couple. Entering the depths rather than floating on the two-dimensional surface, we enter another construction of space and time. Women of color have depth past the dimensions of the five senses. A depth that comes with proximity to spirit, and understanding of Mojuba.

Fundamental elements recovers a space and time relation from the knowledges of Black women from the global south, enacting an Afro-diasporic cosmological perspective. This tool uses a concept of the four quadrants, four directions, four elements to discuss the way in which we move in the world. Animating the Americas through Black women's bodies; understanding memory, geography and genealogy is crucial to my work. Just as Facio and Lara did in their collection of spirit activist pieces, I am "beginning with the body as a place of interrogation, negotiation and healing" (Facio & Lara, 2014, p. 13). I

understand the body as a portable Black self, as quilombo, as home. Constructing and building our homes with endogenous knowledges in the process of our movement.

We are all part of the same whole, contributing to the same planetary ecosystem. We are disillusioned by the idea and manifestations of fragmentation and separation. “O rosto de um é o reflexo do outro, o corpo de um é o reflexo de outro, e cada um o reflexo de todos os corpos [*The face of one is a reflection of the other, the body of one is a reflection of the other, and every individual, a reflection of every body*] ” (Gerber, 2008, p. 29:30). Beatriz Nascimento recognizes the connectivity of humanity. We are reflected pieces of one another, pieces of the world. People feel disconnected from one another and from nature and in turn project that into reality. There is confusion because the individual is fighting to see itself as a separate and whole, when the individual can only close the circuit of the universe with nature. The circuit of energy closes the system with this bodily connection to spirit and mind.

Ôrí as a film and in practice “significa a iniciação á um novo estágio da vida, a uma nova vida, um novo encontro, [*means the initiation to a new stage of being, a new live, a new encounter*]” a search, a remembering of another life in which our humanity is not based on capital production, but on connections with one another. Networks and constellations that cross water and through the air, through spaces and dimensions. Following the map of my body, my inner landscape, I walk in the African Diaspora, letting ancestors guide my feet with their knowledge, trusting them to hold me when I need them. Opportunities to explore meanings that are generations deep in my subconscious, in my muscles, in my hands, in my feet, hair, womb, breast, bones.

MY ORIGIN STORY: RE-ORIENTING PROCESS AND METHODS

Black Women of the African Diaspora such as Jurema Werneck, bell hooks, Audre Lorde and Jacqui Alexander continue their call for urgent solutions to save our lives. *Fundamental elements* is one such response to their calls. This response is one of diasporic network building, healing and knowledge production.

Black women's methodologies may often look experimental to academia. Our ways of understanding, making sense of and explaining the world cannot be expressed using the same tools used to build scholarship as it exists in the archives of academic institutions. Our methods may be narrative, creative, playful, but most importantly dynamic. The dynamic nature of our work is one great distinction from fixed notions of theory, which proliferate academia. To tell meaningful stories about our lives, Black women must use creative methodologies, not traditionally valued in academia. They must work in multiple mediums including but not limited to dreaming, moving, dancing, crafting, drawing, sculpting, workshopping, performing, reflecting, writing, teaching and dialoguing. These mediums must come into balance with one another. The imagination requires multiple mediums. There is a shifting between mediums, mediating meanings in and expression out. Expressing my story requires the use of many mediums. To take the shape of where I am now, to map the terrain and fill the shape of my consciousness, I must myself be a shapeshifter. My shape at any given moment is in accordance with what spirit needs to do the work. I use my body as a threshold, a medium for the work. Moving toward a simultaneity rather than a linearity of truths. I explore epistemological disobedience with my body in its many iterations.

Balance, axé, life force, love, energy. Our guides. Now that I've journeyed through the constructions of the systems that guide and sustain the fields of Latin American Studies and Information Studies and greater yet our Planet, I will journey in another direction and energize this text with the breath of the spirits; the ideas and contributions of the ancestors and my sisters in this story.

First, I will describe the space in which I found myself clearing a path. Sylvia Wynter's work pursues a cognitive decolonial shift that reveals the ways in which the category and understanding of "Human" has been taken for granted. She lifts the veil on otherwise normalized practices of exclusion, delinking herself from hegemonic Western categories of knowledge and philosophy, enacting epistemic disobedience (McKittrick, 2014). Sylvia Wynter undoes Christian theology and secular sciences as they weave into colonial domination. The space she has opened through her unraveling of the naturalized epistemologies makes pathways for imagined re-memberings of humanity. She focuses her attention on the power of origin stories, and how they have contributed to the codification of the ways of knowing and being. She does not propose another epistemology, but rather shows the linkage of "Man" with Humanity in normalized Western discourse. I enter into the space she has illuminated using my body as a measure, a portal, a vessel to expand and re-member epistemologies of knowing and being advised by my ancestors. I build inside the breaks, exploring their capacities. In this opening, in the break, the in-between, the crossing is where I began to practice my work.

Jacqui Alexander outlines, "itineraries of violence: such as democracy or civilization" and how they influence the structuring of our lives as Black women.

Alexander believes “there is a great deal of urgency in reimagining wholeness as a necessary part of a pedagogy of crossing” and the need to do spiritual work to understand “the ways in which knowledge comes to be embodied and made manifest through flesh”(Alexander, 2005, p. 15). Alexander urges us to construct genealogies for ourselves through spiritual theorization and embodied knowledge.

I look to Jacqui Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing* as an initial guide into the crossing. In *Pedagogies* she “intervene[s] in the multiple spaces where knowledge is produced” in order to “interrupt inherited boundaries of geography, nation, episteme, and identity that distort vision so that they can be replaced with frameworks and modes of being” that resonate with our experiences (Alexander, 2005, p. 6). Alexander follows in the idea that “pedagogy is indispensable methodology,” and my journey resonates with this sentiment. Pedagogy is methodology; the way we understand and teach is reflective of our experiences and our processes. Along my journey I use tools unconventional to academic epistemologies that help me to teach and theorize about the endogenous knowledges I carry in my body.

I began feeling my way through the crossing using a spiritual epistemological approach. Scary as it was like Jacqui Alexander, “I had to begin to inhabit that unstable space of not knowing, of admitting that I did not even know how to begin to know” (Alexander, 2005, p. 294). I started on my journey in the summer of 2015, when I traveled to Rio de Janeiro Brazil to participate in a study abroad program called “African Diaspora in the Americas.” Criola, a Black women’s NGO based in Rio de Janeiro Brazil, partners with UT, conceptualizing the space of the course as “multiversity” in opposition to

“university.” They see the course as a coming together of many perspectives of the Diaspora, moving toward Mojuba. Admitting to myself that I did not know where to begin was the first step giving me permission to meet myself where I was, instead of trying to pretend I was somewhere I was not and someone who I was not.

The openness with which I approached this experience was fruitful. Part of the spiritual epistemological approach was listening to elders of spiritual communities. As part of the course, I had the honor of learning from Mãe Beata de Iemanjá, a well know and well respected leader of a terreiro (house of Candomblé) in Rio de Janeiro. She shared stories with my class, imparting wisdom she has gathered through her journey. Three of her messages to us were “the sun is for everyone”, “don’t be afraid to speak “and “love is the foundation for everything.” These messages sat with me and began to germinate. The seeds for moving forward in my work were planted by Mãe Beata de Iemanjá.

Upon my return to UT, these seeds began to sprout and I began moving and constructing healing solutions in the wounded spaces of Austin and academia. My experience as a queer-Black-cis-woman in Austin, at UT had left me wounded; I was not well. I recognized that I was not alone in my injury. Other women of color around me were not well and we needed healing. In lieu of presenting a paper at our Latin American Studies student conference, the normalized way of sharing information in an academic setting, I chose to create a workshop called *Black Feminist Pause: a wellness workshop*. Pedagogy as methodology. One of the seeds grew a little bit more in that moment. I remembered that love was the foundation of everything and for my work in school to flourish, it must be supported by the other facets of myself not fragmented, but part of the same whole. I

reflected on the wisdom and theorizing of Mãe Beata and made them practical, local and specific. I used the experiences of my body, to reflect on the context of Austin in the African Diaspora and think through daily strategies of self-care that were feasible to implement in my routine. I entered the workshop with the intension of sharing what I had learned thus far. I walked away having learned more than I felt I taught but the process of sharing was the take-away. I was able to continue building networks with people across national borders. I was able to transform the classroom into a sacred space, using “the disturbance as a provocation to move past the boundaries of alienation”(Alexander, 2005). The creation of healing spaces altered and moved imaginary boundaries The theoretical was not in opposition to practical but rather in conversation vis-à-vis the workshop.

The impactful experiences I had in the summer of 2015 and the resulting growth told me that I needed to participate in the course the following summer. It took time for the ideas to begin growing in my mind. Seeds sprout slowly, they need continuous care. Black histories are cyclical and we do things in repetition. Repeating the course in a different role would offer another perspective, requiring different skills. I returned to Rio de Janeiro as a teaching assistant in the course “African Diaspora in the Americas.” Coming to the program as a teaching assistant gave me the opportunity to inject my energy into the space to help co-create it as a place where we could teach ourselves and one another (Alexander, 2005, p. 6). I created a space of reflection for students during weekly discussion sessions on the texts we read, as well as their experiences through the course. Reflection was a necessary moment in the building of my spiritual pedagogy because every body is assembled differently. This method was done “in order that we might destabilize existing

practices of knowing and thus cross the fictive boundaries of exclusion and marginalization” in order to learn about ourselves (Alexander, 2005, p. 7). I cross fictive boundaries by engaging all of myself.

Meditating on the workshop I did in Austin and the reflective peer-to-peer discussion sessions I facilitated, I partnered with Criola to create a second iteration of a wellness workshop. Upon initial discussions with Criola, I proposed to create an online space that presented the rich stories featured on their website, in a more interactive visual way. This was not the work that needed to be done. Only through active listening and conversation could I truly develop the project that was beneficial for everyone, the next iteration of necessary work.

The workshop I organized varied slightly from the last, bringing together the ideas of information, storytelling and self-care. I called the workshop *Nossas Histórias* (Our Stories: Self-Care, Information and Storytelling). Participants shared their thoughts on the three topics and participated in the stretching and breathing exercises I incorporated into the structure. This step of the journey was a response to “the urgent task of configuring new ways of being and knowing and [sic] move away from living alterity premised in difference to living intersubjectivity premised in relationality and solidarity” (Alexander, 2005, p. 8). New ways of being and knowing are present with us, we need to slow down and learn to listen to the calls.

Jurema Werneck, a Black feminist intellectual and activist as well as a co-founder of Criola, expresses the same urgency for Black feminists to take action (Werneck, 2007, p. 111). The call became evident in my conversations with Jurema Werneck and Lucia

Xavier in preparation for the workshop. *Nossas Histórias* was a workshop of spirit activism that “performs a shift of consciousness, enacting differently imagined social realities and ecological relationships and actualizing into being a different worldview and logic, one based on harmonious, respectful relationships of diversity-within-unity” (Facio & Lara, 2014, p. 29). It was created in response to a direct call from a Black Brazilian woman who knows better than I did about local needs. We combined my skills and knowledges in conjunction with local needs to create a space of re-membering.

The call for local responses drawing on diasporic knowledge based continued through my next return to Texas. I grew the third iteration of workshops at UT with the local diasporic pedagogical construction in mind. Women of color graduate students needed safe spaces for them to do healing work. I organized a wellness yoga flow for graduate students, specifically women of color. The action I took was to create a safe place and resource for doing the necessary healing work to continue in our journeys in life and academia. The growth of this workshop spawned from the inspiration of another Black feminist from Brazil, Luciane O’Rocha. I worked on “creating, nurturing, resisting, and recuperative acts” that supported my local community (Rocha, 2014). We must share in community, heal community and not try to do everything alone. Sharing in community through nurturing, resistance, creating helps to heal us locally. Trying to accomplish everything individually goes against the premise of Mojuba.

In the spirit of Mojuba, and intervening in the many spaces where knowledge is produced, I used my body as a medium for the transmission of knowledge through stage performance. This opportunity sprung from a class called “Women of Color Feminisms

and the Work of the Imagination.” Ananya Chatterjea, did a workshop about embodied knowledge with us. She spoke of transtemporality, meeting places that were not just in the here and now, but remembering how we had met before in another time and place. Towards the end of our workshop, Chatterjea had a vision about a piece she was choreographing in residency with the UT Dance Repertory Theater. She invited me to take part in a dance piece called “Walking With Natasha,” which was

an homage to young black and brown women thriving in the face of hate. It invoke[d] both Natasha Nkhama, the student at Baylor University, and Professor Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley. While Natasha Nkhama is a reminder of the context in which this piece is made, the feelings after the recent election and the refusal of young women of color to submit to it is [Chatterjea’s] tribute to Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley. It [was] about the way in which two women of color have found each other to create a practice of solidarity without necessarily making a deliberate ‘plan’ and continue international love and support (Chatterjea, 2017).

Accepting the invitation was something terrifying to me, for I did not yet know the details, but I said yes, for spirit had put it in my path. Up until this point, I had been thinking about my thesis as separate from the other work that I was doing while in graduate school. At the moment of engaging in this performance space, my theory and pedagogy became grounded, grounded in my body in space and place rooted in my Yoruba ancestry. I Could invite the knowledges that did not feel welcome in academia back into my work. This performance piece gave me the opportunity to process ideas in a more dynamic way. It settled in for me that theory was no longer separate from practice. My body’s knowledge was linked with those of my brain.

My writing supported my work now rather than comprising it. Writing is a medium that fixes ideas in time and space. Writing is a difficult process because by time we try to

capture the ideas on the page, they have already moved. The ideas that make it to the Black and white page, need to be taken in their context and time. Performing in a dance piece allowed my theorizing to be dynamic, drawing upon the multiple tools necessary to my survival process. Survival looks different on different days, so I hold many tools, implementing them when necessary.

In preparing for this piece I returned to the space of not knowing where to begin, for I had not before done this kind of embodied work and performance. Chatterjea held the space for me to explore the unknown and move past the fear. She prompted us to explore the moment in the dance studio just as a professor would probe you to expand upon an idea from in a standard classroom setting. Our bodies were the texts with which we theorized, prompts such as “what does it feel like to rub up against someone in passing? How does your body respond?” My brain had to memorize the words, but then my body had to communicate them. Through the sound of my voice, through the gestures it made. My body is my spirit’s vessel. Performing was another form of teaching, another form of spiritual pedagogical epistemological practice, and a pedagogical tool that taught and continues to teach me. My thesis in performance form.

I saw that “contrary to some dominant views that assume that being spiritual is a passive, apolitical state, we are affirming that as deployed within a ‘spiritual activist’ worldview, it is active, it moves us into further action, and sustains the multiple ways we participate in social justice”(Facio & Lara, 2014). This performance was one of the multiple ways I embody my work. Theory and practice, not as separate but supporting one another. Omi Jones reminds us that Black women “understand that political theory and the

poem are not opposites, but expressions of the necessary multiple epistemologies that constitute Black life. Art's danger lies in the break, the space of freedom, if there is freedom. The space of the not-known, being birthed into existence. The space of the imagination" (Omi Osun Jones, 2016). Poems can be theory and theory can be poems. All forms are parts of the same whole, different ways of knowing the same things. Not knowing is part of the process toward achieving our freedom. We imagine our freedom.

Our freedom cannot be created using traditional tools. Those tools do not work in the break. The imagination yields art, innovatively borrowing what resonates, to reverberate our freedoms into reality. To accomplish the goal of re-membering the feeling of balance and love, I had to trust in my path and the process; that it would bring me full circle.

The most recent part of my journey is an exhibition called *Moving Into Alignment* I planned as part of a class called "Literacy and Memory Technologies." Memory has been coopted by what can be written down. Writing has animated our world since colonization used it as a technology of power. Writing organizes relations of people to one another and different entities. *Moving Into Alignment* locates memory back in the body, back in nature. Through aligning the body with our minds and our spirits, we recover a connection with nature that was taken away and distanced with the imposition of writing as the superior technology of memory. The exhibition is in alignment with the seven chakras or energy centers of the body.



Figure 2: “O’Lola” (roma|amor, 2017)

I commissioned pieces from Black women in my constellation with movements through Austin to align these energies of each chakra. The workshop is a pedagogical tool that imagines a community museum space as animate and dynamic. As a space of dynamic remembering, this exhibition is my working wellness toolkit, doing the work I originally wanted to accomplish through this written medium, however it is too fixed, too stagnant to grow with our healing needs. The exhibition allows the dynamic nature of healing to grow and shift with the energy flow and needs of the local Black community.

Now I can use this space of writing to re-reflect on this dynamic process, providing context for the work. This exhibition brings together healers doing work in the Austin communities, pointing visitors to other healing spaces, and connecting them to the resources that are there for them. The exhibition is designed in stations around the George Washington Carver Museum to bring visitors on a self-guided tour of the space, showing them the resources that are there to support them, simultaneously teaching them another epistemology of humanity. *Moving Into Alignment* highlights the connection we forget to our bodies. It does the work of magical thinking to create routes of movement the help us heal. Imagination and magic are crucial to my spiritual pedagogical practice. My spiritual activism works to overcome

these impasses [the ones between spirit and imagination, aspects of creative process] becomes part of the process. This mode of perception is magical thinking: It reads what happens in the external world in terms of my personal intentions and interests. It uses external events to give meaning to my own myth making. Magical thinking is not traditionally valued in academic writing (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 5).

Magical thinking is another piece to my pedagogical practice. It is a tool I use to assemble the pieces my spirit guides reveal to me.

Assembling the pieces happens in more forms than just writing. I practice a performative auto-ethnography, using my body to theorize in space. My practice theorizing performative auto-ethnography extends beyond the written world. My work lives in many places, spaces and resides in different mediums all channeled through my body. I reflect on my process through the body of *Fundamental elements* as well as in performance and in teaching.

Similar to *Pedagogies of Crossing*, *Fundamental elements* functions as an archive of this moment in opposition to imperial knowledges (Alexander, 2005, p. 2). It is my origin story that documents my journey as a guidebook, to a possibility of moving through academic spaces with an intention to transform them for the purposes of healing. Recovering our wholeness and humanity as Black women in the Diaspora by and through any means necessary.

Fundamental elements is not a culmination, but the beginning of a conversation about Black women's wellness. It offers a point from which to move and reference as we navigate the Diaspora. Having a conversation on my own time, guided by my ancestors, towards a more balanced self and community is the goal. To guide myself and community toward this goal, I have re-membered a model from traditions in the African Diaspora, making a practical tool that I use in my day-to-day routine.

FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS OF LOVE MODEL: A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL

The Fundamental Elements has helped me find my way back to myself. This elemental model is a pedagogical tool that has grown out of the experiences I have had

along this journey, drawing in pieces from different places. It is a tool I use to continue teaching myself how to save my own life, so that I may continue participation in these important conversations. If we are not here, alive and well, we cannot have conversations about our daily experiences with power and violence and their implications. *Fundamental elements* works to provide a guide for an alternative understanding of humanity that is not currently legible by hegemonic systems of knowing rooted in Western epistemologies. It does work to redefine what it means to be human, find love in the relationships with community, information, the world around and inside ourselves. My contribution to the conversation of wellness for Black women in the African Diaspora is grounded in experience, experience rooted in my body. I have journeyed in and with my body through different physical spaces in the African Diaspora, across fictive boundaries, moving energies to shift the airspace.

I want to make clear that the assemblage of this model is done in collective conversation with brown and Black women of the Diaspora. It draws upon the multiple mediums in which we converse.

The lived experience of on-the-ground, co-inhabited cultural diversity has functioned as a fluid, omnipresent, alternative and global social imaginary always-in-the-making. This is different from cultural appropriation; this is multicultural conformation, cross-cultural synchronization, sympathetic attraction to the humane against the dehumanization of beliefs and practices from dominant cultures. It has been the affinity for both truth and meaning” (Facio & Lara, 2014, p. 27).

The Black Diaspora is in constant motion, flux and movement. It is constantly changing yet recognizable (Reis, 2011, p. 8). In theorizing from a global south, Black women’s, cosmological perspective, I take Perry’s assertion that “although separated by

geographic, sociocultural, economic, and political borders, Afro-descendant women have had the historic role as vanguards in the maintenance and reorganization of sociocultural, economic and political structures related to the Afro-descendant population” (Perry, 2009, p. 5). These diasporic commonalties offer a basis for connection that allows for Black women to build genealogies for ourselves that counter our natal alienation (Patterson, 1982). I use the elements to imagine and re-member a genealogy that connects Black women throughout the Diaspora.

The building of genealogies requires a common grounding. The body is the related entry point into the conversation of the search for home, for roots. Black women’s bodies are contested territory, as white hegemony lay claim to them, we take active resistive stances and make radical movement toward change. Jurema Werneck calls for immediate action, drawing attention to the leadership of *Ioladês*, or “women who act as agents of political change and the primary owners of the wealth they successfully conquered”(Werneck, 2007, p. 105). Their strategies are based in “oral and corporeal traditions passed from hand to mouth to attentive eyes, in spaces where the inherited tradition was updated” (Werneck, 2007, p.104). I am using the oral corporeal traditions of my ancestors following their lead by modifying them to the present moment and context. My ancestors used their bodies and their voices to make sense of energies around them, learning to work with them in balance. I am doing the same. I am updating the circular elemental model in Kongo cosmology, Yoruba tradition, and many other spiritual practices, into a three-dimensional tool that aligns with my experiences.

As we have established, moving in the break, in the crossing requires an elemental model for movement. I propose to explore what it means for Black women to have depth and find balance using the elements around us.



Figure 3: “Wellness Wheel” (roma|amor, 2016e)

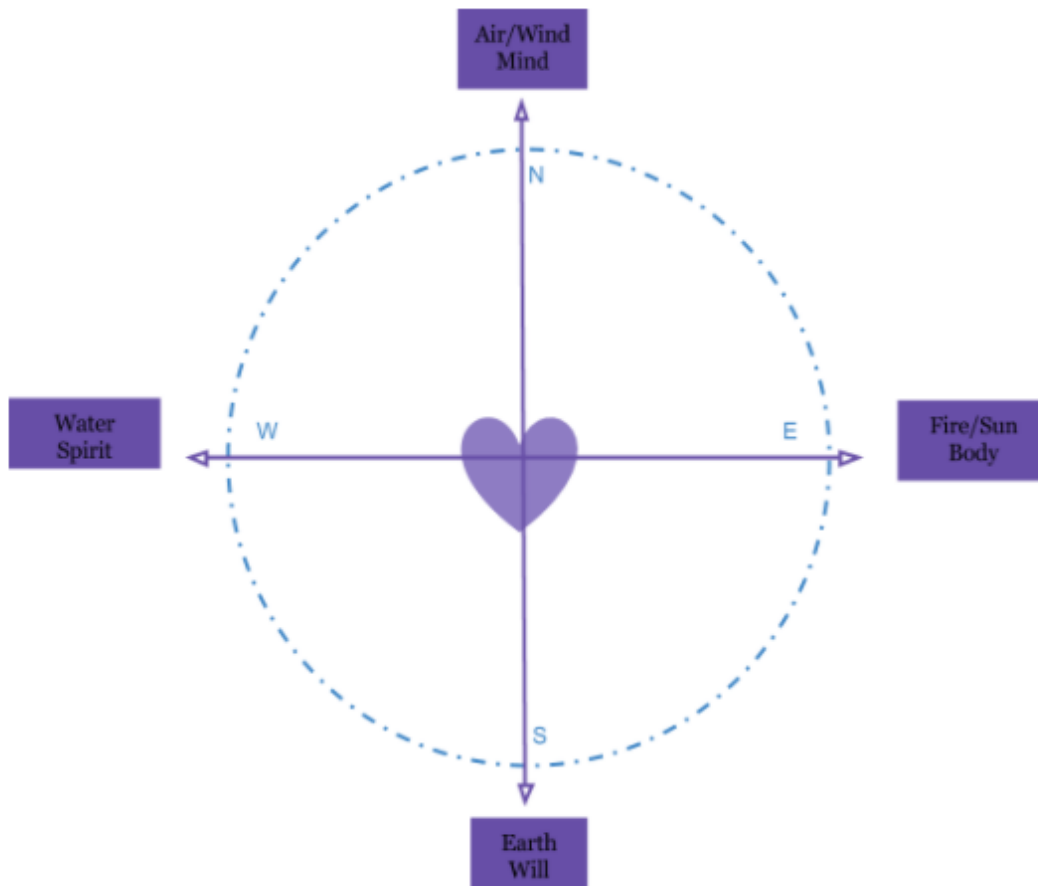


Figure 4: Bird's Eye View of Fundamental Elemental Model

The elements around us and in us work together in balance. They come together to constitute a whole system. Air in the north, water in the west, earth in the south and fire in the east. Figure 3 is the three-dimensional model off which the *Fundamental elements* are based. Figure 4 provides a birds-eye view of the three-dimensional model engaged. We can use the three-dimensional wheel to re-flect on where we are in our lives. It allows us to take the bird's eye view and feel what the depth of each element brings Theorizing

knowledges according to the four sections of the wheel, shifts epistemological possibilities of what we know and how we know it.

The wheel is broken into four sections reflecting four elements and four directions, each with their own goal. I use this model as a pedagogical tool to re-member a humanity that was taken from us through colonization. I use it to re-flect the love and light that has been graciously shared with me through time. This love and light that spills onto the page explores the three-dimensional existence of these elements in our lives.

Fundamental Elements is part of the work I am doing to save my life. To continue the conversations explored in the *The Lay of the Land*, I must be alive, I must be breathing to participate. In this space, I share reflections of my process of how I got to where I am. How I save my life and live in my body every day. I present this project in sections representing the four elements of air, water, earth and fire, as they are associated with their own specific directions and goals. These four elements take their place as part of a wheel, helping us teach ourselves about us and the world around us. This model engages spiritual-pedagogies that guide us toward a humanity not recognized/legible in the hegemonic world we live in. This model helps to redefine what it means to be human, basing human values on love.

The redefinition of humanity is not something I can tackle alone, nor in this project alone. There is much more to each of these elements and our diasporic work than I can address in this text, so I will approach each of the elements with a specific goal in mind. I will share how I re-covered pieces of my own humanity. I will discuss air as how we breathe and create space, water as how we quench our thirst, hydrate, and nourish, earth as

how we ground, stabilize, and make home, and fire as how we find motivation and sustain our energy.

The discussion will move through many ideas presented in *The Lay of the Land* such as what it means to be human and where we make home. The discussion makes exchanges with Black (proto) feminists, with focus on those from the global south, paying particular attention to cosmological, endogenous understandings of time and space relations. The text expresses the embodied experience of my journey by reflecting upon the actions I took. You will find narrative reflections of my actions across the four elements, helping to illustrate my movements in connection with the elemental goal. In addition to the narrative reflective theorizing, I include reflections in the form of poetry and paintings to add more depth to the story.

Practice and attention to process are central to deepening my understandings of my relations with the world around me. Western theory has developed disjointed from practice as well as without attention to the specificities of people of color, especially Black women. “We [women of color] have not rushed to create abstract theories. For we know there are countless women of color, both in [the United States] and in the rest of the world to whom our singular ideas would be applied”(Christian, 1987, p. 60) . I am not racing for theory, but rather theorizing in my own time. The time measured by heart beats. It is up to us as Black Women to save our own lives, to keep our hearts beating and our lungs breathing. This requires us to learn to listen to and work with our bodies, minds and spirits wholly. The *Fundamental elements* focuses on teaching myself through the engagement of this elemental-spiritual-pedagogical tool. The project moves away from standardized Western

academic models of literacy and memory that don't work for Black and brown women, and moves toward one that does.

The order in which I work through the elements is based on my own origin story, in my life. This does not mean where I start in the discussion is where the discussion should and does begin. I am picking an entry point in our cyclical model and will come full circle in the end. All elements are of equal importance in the cycle and part of the same whole system. The body of this project will reflect the repetitive, cyclical, dynamic nature of Black women's diasporic work, ending where I begin, with love.

Continuing in our lives cycles, continuing to engage in conversations about the state of our Planet and existence, we must be alive to speak. I must first save my own life by any means necessary. The body of this text is part of the work I do to save my own life. To survive we must acquire and share the tools to be well with one another, for our work is, always has been and always will be collective (Christian, 1987, p. 53). Through my discussion, I hope that you may understand how the four elements helped me through my journey, and gain ideas about the possibilities engaging this pedagogical tool rooted in Black women's diasporic cosmological and spiritual epistemologies open.

SAVING MY LIFE

Saving my life

A moment of silence

I would like to start with a moment of silence.

inhale, exhale

Help us to heal from all the violence.

All of the pain and loss.

No longer will they play the boss.

Let us celebrate and feel joy

Let it radiate from the heart,

shooting out through our limbs,

Like the trees that we were meant to be

Reaching out beyond our bodies,

permeating space and time alike.

Silently staying, swaying, praying.

“Ya know, often people say to me who are you talking to?

I am talking to myself.

You know, I feel like in a lot of ways

I’ve allowed myself also to take things without challenging them

To step around things to feel that confrontation is messy

To feel that feeling uncomfortable is not what I want

Even if it sacrifices my own freedom

My own sense of movement.

First I’m talking to me.

Then the person next to me.”

-Claudia Rankine (Detroit Public TV, 2015)

Self-talk

I talk to myself all the time.

About how my day went.

Trying to let go of the negative energies

I collected while riding down Speedway.

I told myself I’d put my love for myself at the top of my list

No matter how others saw me.
I am growing into the tree I was always destined to be.

If the work we are doing is not saving our own lives, we should not be doing it. What does the work of saving my own life look like, feeling from the skin I'm in? The process of unlearning, and remembering to re-learn is not one that happens overnight. Working the imagination is just that, work. Work that is able to translate our existences into a form legible to our whole beings. The imagination requires multiple mediums. It is an exercise in rethinking boundaries, possibilities and realities. These exercises of rethinking and remembering are strengthened through understanding the multiplicity of simultaneous truths that constitute the universe. When we remember and piece ourselves and our stories back together, beyond the borders of nation-states and static location, we move closer to our roots, to one another. Roots originate somewhere, they nourish something. By engaging in *epistemic disobedience*, Sylvia Wynter's prodding at the normalized definition of human points to the crossing, the space in which Black women's articulations of origin and existence find their breath (Alexander, 2005; W. Mignolo, 2011). A space of delinking from colonialities' power matrices, in which my origins, my ancestors and their knowledges construct the materiality of my world. Here in this work of my imagination, I manifest tools that pull from my knowledges, to save my life on the daily. Originating in my roots, nourishing my soul.

Knowledge of the tools that work with you and your body, does not create an effect alone, you must engage those tools as well. I know my body needs to move for me to understand the world, yet my body's time hasn't quite synced up with my mind, those

connections atrophied. Responding to the expectations of the environment I'm in. Straining my body to fit right in. All semester stretching and breathing every morning to feel myself from the inside out, felt disjointed from the writing I was doing. Then one Thursday towards the end of the fall semester, my inner flame was sparked when I was challenged to exercise my narrative imagination, incorporating the body, the breath and storytelling back together. Stepping into the room with my whole self, as Robbie McCauley urged me to do, was enough. I stepped into the dance studio with an opportunity to work my imagination, and I walked out with an opportunity for my imagination to live through my body. I danced and performed my imagination's work in *Momentum*, reminding me that the work is possible.

Weaving me into the piece Chatterjea was in residency choreographing, "Walking with Natasha," gave me the opportunity to re-member how my light wants to shine, to continue learning how to save my life. How to embrace my vulnerabilities to work with not against myself. Weaving my narrative into the story like threads, stitching the fabric of our everyday experience, resistance and resilience. This story was temporary, lasting only a moment on my route, but the love I have for it made me contemplate how I could find similar moments every day. Moments of pure love and light in my body, every single day.

Alexander reminds us that "it is the daily practice that will bring about the necessary shifts in perception that make change possible" (Alexander, 2005, p. 279). What does the shift in perception look like in the everyday? How do I find moments of love and light? I began thinking about the different elements that we interact with in our daily lives, the elements that constitute our existence on the earth. Our beings are a combination of these

forces so all future possibilities are present within us in different combinations. I remembered that breath is what animates our bodies, what ties our bodies to spirit in this world. Making our feelings tangible by the skin we are in. Saving my life meant looking inward to find a self that was moveable. One consistent with the energies I know are there, unshaken by imposed rhetorics projected on my present body. Our bodies are made of over fifty percent water. Our breath floats our memories like rafts in this water, where our souls are left to navigate. Floating over the currents of the deep blue tides, balancing the energies pulling us in different directions, we find our stride. Our souls use their love and their light to find their way.

Love and light are energies from different directions that pull us into divine balance. The four elements of wind, water, fire and air, can be mapped to different energetic entities (Facio & Lara, 2014). All elements balance through and for one another, centering in the heart, in love. Remembering this love every day, is something I need to save my life, to make me feel whole and well. The *Fundamental elements* wellness wheel is a concept that has helped me remember the aspects of this delicate balance on the daily. It is a three-dimensional model I have made, to assist in prayer, in my spiritual practice, inviting me to remember that all parts of me, all energies are accessible, even if not all are in view at the same time. The elements are simultaneous truths that I hold, that the earth holds. Each page of the wheel represents one element respectively, earth, air, water, and fire, the different directions and aspects of self and the world (Figure 4). You can begin looking at it from any page; there is no sequential order, no linear trajectory. Reflecting the cyclical nature of our understandings. Remembering all energies are circulating, they are all there, no need

to fear forgetting. I let my mind go, drop into the depth of my body, trusting in my vessel to hold my weight and more.

A Prayer for guidance

Hide me, guide me, to true north
This compass, four directions from which we draw to center ourselves in love.
Drawing us into our own depths.
Not only extending in four directions, but also crossing through multiple dimensions.
Guiding us to one another, our true north.

Truth, how do you get to your own truth, when everyone denies that it is valid?
When you walk around feeling energies people tell you are not real.
You know they are, so you settle for calling yourself crazy.
Buying into the box they left you in to rot.

You pray your way back to yourself.
Sending prayers in any direction they will fly.
Kindling the fire within.

You send a prayer to the water, to the air, to the earth and to the sun,
The moon reflecting love back at you, making you blush and feel warm inside.
Flirting with the moon,
Following her energy is how you find your way back.

You were lost from the day your body was born into its role of capital producer.
Limited to the knowledges that arise in the head,
and money that your labor produces.
Body, numb, in the backseat of life.

You walk in your path,
Your memory comes back in flashes
In Fragments, in pieces
Up for you to re-arrange,
Re-assemble,
Re-member.

Like piecing together your dreams.
This is my altar.
Not a perfect circle but
The energy flows
In the break
In the crossing
Through my core.

An altar in which I pray
Like Friday night Shabbat, challah and wine
To orixá and ancestor, mother earth and galaxies.

“What language do you understand?
Hebrew?
English?
Portuguese?
Yoruba?
Yiddish?”
I ask spirit.
Spirit responds to me,
“not spoken language.
Energy, my child.”

I am walking with you,
as I walk with our sisters,
our ancestors.

Moving, swaying
the way the pen writes on paper
To embrace their soulless rhetoric.
One that lashes you
Across the larynx,
Leaving you at a loss for words.
Because they cannot possibly
Feel
What you feel.

They gave up their sense(s),
When they claimed the mind,
The Ego,
To be The Knowledge.
Sentience, written off
Energia, tirada fora.
We forgot that breath is what gives us life.

Not money.

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

Breathe in.
Breathe out.

Bre...
Bre...

Acabou.

The rhythm lost all too soon.
But you knew it was coming sometime
From the sugar overload that
Dispersed your blood memories
Farther from one another,
Then back again,
Crashing together in a whirlwind.

Build the rhythm from your body, from your heartbeat,
Feel the vibrations radiate in your feet.

Into the light,
To make a place for us.

First made with
The love and light,
That sits as a seed, in your heart
Growing with balanced care
Of
Mind
Will
Spirit
and
Ancestors.
Cared for in mindful practice
Breathing, Moving, Meditating
Learning to listen, and trust yourself
Trust your body.

Quilombo.
Home.
Mend the spirit back into the material of the body and the mind.
Weave the sentient narrative.
Don't lose the galaxy dust.

Remember what that felt like to
Root into the ground
Using that energy to get back up
To spring up.
Springboard into your highest self,
Barreling down in a backwards dive
Piercing the ocean's surface
You hear the blue so deep in your bones.
You are home.

The bubbles rise to the top,
Toward the light
As you melt into the depths of the embrace
Planets of stingrays
And galaxies of trees
They swim your way
Bouncing off the vibrations of the waves.
Currents carry you currently through the rainy days
When you hide away
When you sit and pray
That you will see the way
Through the riff and the raff
And the slight, can't help but laugh.

When I sit down to meditate
It's really hard to get it all straight
Your head above your heart above your pelvis above your knees
above your toes
In a line
In align
In A line
The line,
Go down the road and keep on straight.
But n****s you gon' have to wait

Excuse me?
What?
I don't understand what you've uttered.

Sounded like you are confused
Like your
“Misunderstandings are Dangerous” (Omi O. Jones, 2012)
“Pray everyday.
Just a little my dear
Goes a long way
We’ll teach you that yesterday is tomorrow
All the same when you sit with me
Close to the tree, to the root
You root down
Down to the ground
The path not on ground but through water
The path of least resistance.
Circling, and moving on.
Circuits, conducting electricity.”
They whisper in my ear.

I remember when the trees sway in the breeze
Leaves moving every which way
Skies of grey when the rain comes down.
I remember how my skin itched,
When the ocean water dried and salt stuck to my melanin,
Mmm salty
As my tongue tastes
The droplets of ice that
Formed on my lashes.
How my chest tightens
To the fear of losing her galaxies of trees,
So I cling on for dear life.
I am made of stardust, of love, of light.

D(rafts)

Drafts float like rafts,
A project grows in drafts,
tweaking and refining as you go.
Constant shifting and calling upon your past to inform your future,
guiding your through the present.
You are made to present yourself.
As something you are not.
As someone so put together,
no glimmer of imperfection.

Let me make a correction.
My soul floats on a raft,
Following my inner ocean's tides.
My body today is present as a draft.
An iteration,
A manifestation
Of this work in progress.

Laughter

Truly is the best medicine
It always leaves me with a grin.
Lashed with words all day
Skies cloudy and grey.
Laughter's beams strike through,
Tapping into my inner blue.
Staying true, to the hues,
that float drafts, like rafts,
taking cues from you.
I roll around, making waves inside
They don't let any feelings hide.
Wash away the day, the skies of grey.
A reminder, to pray a little every day.

Love Is The Foundation Of Everything

Love is the foundation of everything. It is the definition of humanity, the glue that holds us all together. We derive the meaning of human value(s) from love. Love is a weaving constellation. It is what connects us to one another, what helps us to save our own

lives. It is the balance at our center, the motivation of our elemental energies. Love is dynamic and portable. Love is where we find our energy, our guiding light. Love is the reclamation of time. If what we do is not rooted in love we will wake up every day dreading having to get up and out of bed. We will breathe enough grief eventually to lead to our deaths. We must find love, our inner lights to guide us, guide us back to ourselves, each other and balance.

Love is the foundation of everything

Love unconditionally.
Love without expectations of return.
We give, we give, we give
of ourselves
until we are depleted.
Empty.
Pulling out everything we have and laying it on the table.
Just to be stolen.
When does the love return?
When is it my turn?
My time to take?
because I find myself off balance
it's such a challenge
pulling myself to get out from under the covers
to greet the sun another day
I need to sit down and pray
to ask for the help that I need
and not feel guilty for going astray.
It is not your fault
but you must pick up the pieces
of your broken heart
and fractured memories.
Assemble them, so that you may feel whole.
Feel loved.
Re-plenish the depleted stories.
Re-cover your energy
your purpose,
your drive,
come alive.

Step out of your shadow
and into your light.
Don't Drown in all the grief and fright.
Re-member the fighting, loving kid inside,
let her out to run and play, take a ride.
She is you and you are her,
separated by some
movements of the stars and cycles of planets.
You are forever connected and never apart
as long as you remember to trust in your heart.

Call and Response

Reflecting the cyclical nature of life
I will not cave in to all of the strife.
My ancestors call me at nighttime,
To follow them into my dreams,
To meet them in the crossing
Where everything is as it seems.
I am calling upon my ancestors, as they have called upon me
To make the most out of my two degrees.

I call upon my ancestors for an intergenerational collaboration
Crossing borders of imagined nations.
I follow them, they follow me, through the universe and back,
Yet nobody is keeping track.

We live days full of love, not full of grief and stress
I find my way up when I'm down, they expect nothing less.
Constellations are not fixed, they move
We both know this, so there is nothing to prove.

They know then, and I know now
With each other, we will always know how
Know how to keep moving, in the face of hate
They remind me my body holds more than its weight.

My body dances, core undulating
Oceans rushing up out of my throat, flooding my mouth to sing
Helping me to make it through the spring
Dropping me back into my body to see what the day brings.

Meditate on love

Let it sink into your skin,

know how it feels to win,
the stretch in your cheeks when you crack a true grin
that starts in your heart with a dart of light you cannot miss,
And teaches much to those who witness this sweet bliss,
A bit of humility in the quest for peace and love,
Exú talking to you not from below nor above,
With her quick wit, peering back at you.
Tap into your inner blue.
She looks at you and speaks from somewhere deep within,
Tells you to
Feed the ancestors and let them feed you,
follow them as they guide you
as you pull them,
as they push you to your limits,
to the borders,
to effrontery.
Flow to and fro,
nowhere to go
but dive into the water,
the wave,
the world,
the globe,
the circle,
the cycle,
the cycle of our time.
Where the future is our past,
which is our present,
which was our history.
It's not a mystery,
just a bit misty,
a bit hazy,
and it makes me crazy,
no they make me crazy,
no they make me think I am crazy,
that I am lazy,
that I am incapable of making it through the storm,
that I will adhere to their norm,
to their mold,

as If I am not made of gold and do not shine.
But queens can't help but shine with their ôri's of gold.
Draped with honey,
sweet as money is to the Capitol,
that wants nothing more than to do me in,
but I won't let you win
because I love myself.
All that I am and will be.
Finding home in my body, I have the key.

I loved myself enough, to re-learn how to breathe. Breathe in, then out. Seems easy,
right? Simple, yes, but easy, no. I love myself, so I will learn how to breathe and how to
create space for my constellations and me.



Figure 5: "Air" (roma|amor, 2016a)

Air

Air is how we breathe, and create space.

“I can’t breathe,” words that have come to represent the collective experience of Black people in the African Diaspora. Suffocation, asphyxiation. Breathing is a cycle, in and out. This cycle must be repeated to support our bodies, to carry them on Planet Earth. Breath motivates our other systems to run. Movement is a given with breath. Our diaphragm expands and contracts; our chest rises and falls, our heart pumps. The heart slows down without air. When space is constricted, our breath shallows. Air delivers oxygen into our bloodstreams helping the memories flow more fluently. The inhalation helps us to create space, the exhale helps us move into that space we’ve created for ourselves. The north, the place of air, allows us to get a bird’s eye view of the situation. Taking in the various components that affect our realities.

ACTION REFLECTIONS

I needed to create space for myself to breathe. I arrived at UT not knowing exactly what I was doing there, or where I was going with school. One thing I knew was that I was present in the space of academia for the next three years and I needed to make space for myself somehow. I needed to make space internally and externally. I needed to make inner space by learning about myself and what my motivations were. I needed outer space to breathe and express my inner worlds. In exploring my inner worlds, I noticed my archive would benefit from Black feminisms. More gaps of memory could be filled with these knowledges. The first thing I realized was that there were many Black feminisms not just

one Black feminism. I was going to have to re-member my own rendition. This process was exhausting. I felt unable to maneuver graduate school and needed a breath of air to energize my path in a direction, moving away from Austin's air and breathing the air in another part of the Diaspora gave me another perspective from which to learn.

I did not have enough lung capacity to shout across oceans to Brazil, through different frequencies of white noise, so I physically moved myself in my first summer of graduate school, to a space where Black women were having discussions that resonate with me. Traveling through the air, to a space created intentionally as a space of the African Diaspora informed by models rooted in Black feminisms, I began creating space for me to bounce ideas around. Black women from the U.S. and from Brazil sat together in the same classroom trading ideas and building community across national borders. We found many things in common and learned just as much from the commonalities as from the specific differences.

We made space for one another through exchange in English as well as Portuguese. The course "African Diaspora in the Americas" was engaged as a multiversity rather than a university (Criola, 2015). The multiversal aspect created a class is where I could more fully reach and grab some of my Yoruba roots, grounding me to more adequately heal in my body. Healing my body, I gained a greater capacity to exhale, my body made more space with attention to my breath.

The Black feminist pause workshop at the Institute of Latin American Studies Student Association at the University of Texas at Austin's Conference, felt like the first of many exhales on my journey. I began to move into the space I had created by inhaling the

concepts I'd been processing the previous summer, and learning from how my body made space for and with them. The workshop opened up the airwaves of the Diaspora, bringing together perspectives of heterogeneous folks from the U.S., Mexico and Brazil amongst other countries. I was able to hold space for necessary healing exchange. Our bodies exchanged information through energy passed through the air, and our ideas were transferred via sound waves that left mouths and reached ears. Suggestions for the creation of other spaces of contact emerged from this workshop. Participants from Juárez were interested in online exchange to bring back resources to their communities to continue the conversations we began in the workshop. I knew a small seedling was being watered. Leaving this workshop, I was able to exhale.

Breathing was what connected all of my skillsets together. As I continued thinking about the heterogeneous experiences of Black women in the African Diaspora, I was afforded the opportunity to work with many different viewpoints. Despite participating in the course the previous summer, the feeling was different. The composition of people and of space held a different energy. The collective breath of the class told a different story.

It told a story of necessary healing across space and time. *Nossas Histórias* formed from conversations with Criola about what I could do to support the goals of the organization as well as carry out my summer fieldwork. Lúcia Xavier and Jurema Werneck explained the kind of work the organization was currently involved in, consisting of digital campaign work, and supporting partner projects amongst others. In line with their digital work, I initially proposed to create an online space that iterated the stories of Black women's work in Brazil, in a multi-media representation, to engage multiple audiences.

This digital space has real and material effects. The breath is a material that we all need to survive. Nothing else gets done when you cannot breathe; breathing is something that we all have in common. Starting at the root, the breath, the basics and fundamentals of life, we build ourselves out. When we cannot breathe, nothing else matters.

I brought this vital element of breathing into the *Nossas Histórias* workshop. When I asked participants of *Nossas Histórias* what attracted them to the workshop, a few folks said they were curious how information, storytelling and self-care were related entities. They had heard and thought about some of these terms but not others and wanted to know how they fit together. I fit the pieces together through the narration of my story, drawing connections between these three domains. Through sharing my story, they began reflecting upon information, storytelling and self-care and information in the context of their own stories. I shared my knowledge and got others in return. This exchange helped me to breathe, fostering continued engagement with ideas that I hold close to me.

The ideas I hold close to me are only re-validated in community sharing. When I can breathe with others, our breath gains more power. The graduate yoga workshop I lead reflected our collective winds. I needed a source of breath, in place that feels like trees are dead. The air hangs so thick, that outside becomes a ruined place. Tree death. Our collective breath cleared the air momentarily. Women of color collectively make magic by taking care of our bodies, minds and spirits as one whole. I was so happy to share and create space with other women of color graduate students who sought healing space and process.

I sought healing in all ways possible. I needed healing in my writing process. I sent out energies for opportunities and one breathed life back into me. I needed that breathe

because I was so discouraged. I felt a dead-end in my body. My breath could no longer move. I was paralyzed. The blockage imposed unnecessary fear, anxiety and stress into my body. I was out of breath during my first rehearsal dancing with Chatterjea as I tried to match my body to the movements with my breath. Not having learned choreography the day prior, I worked extremely hard to catch up with the rest of the dancers. My body was super sweaty and tired, but connecting with my breath pulled me through. Although I was not able to work at my preferred speed, Chatterjea, created space for me within the rehearsals and her process to be. She met me where I was and I worked to meet her where she was. The beautiful thing about our short four-day interaction, was the reminder that our ancestors had met before, that our work in this moment was another iteration of previous encounters. We had before created space together, and that familiarity allowed us both to breathe easier.

Breath was an extremely important element in my performance process. I needed my breath to access the ancestral memories called upon to conjure the spirit-guide I portrayed. I used my breathe to relax my mind, connecting the words to the bodily movements. Connecting my energy to the rest of cast of “Walking With Natasha” and with the spirit of the piece. This piece engaged with the process of moving when you get slashed across the larynx, left without air to speak, from lashing violences. The process of clearing pathways through clogged lungs to breathe. We need to cough to get some movement back into our lungs, the air and our lives. To break through the blockages that cause terror in our everyday. We use breath to energize the creation of spaces of the imagination. I created for myself to theorize through dance, through dance performance, through breath.

The breath is what animates our bodies with our spirits fleshing our spirits and spiriting our flesh (Facio & Lara, 2014). In my personal experience with yoga and meditation, the breath has been a powerful tool in bringing alignment. *Moving Into Alignment: A Healing Circuit of the African Diaspora* was inspired by breath, by the bird's eye view. The rapid gentrification of Austin, especially the east side, and the continuing violences Black people face warranted continued commitments to healing. This exhibition brings Black women healers with movements through Austin into the same space. It weaves their energy into a constellation, through a thread of chakra energies (Figure 2). All bodies carry these energies and we can tap into them to heal ourselves. Chakras, or energy centers of the body, can orient us toward a more balanced life. Using the breath to move through these energy centers helps us move into alignment and find wholeness.

Where do I begin?

I admit to myself,
I do not know where to begin.
Maybe begin in the skin you're in.
Wear it from the inside out,
Ignore them when they holler and shout
For they don't know what you're going through
Don't waste your breath, they don't care boo.

But where do I begin?
How do you teach what you feel but cannot say?
How do you teach about the energy that moves through your body to guide you?
How do you teach about how you re-member, when the memory is not in your head?

Where do you begin?
You cannot begin to talk about healing
without acknowledging that there is something to heal from.

This healing emerges from wounds so deep,
we often cannot truly know the depth.
Wounds opened in our histories like wormholes,
Black holes.
Shifting and warping time and space with proximity.
Approach your journey from the inside out.
Beginning in the skin you're in.

Lonely

"The wind blew, the hat from my head,
Was it you?
Was it you?
You always play too much
You used to play too much."
(Woods, 2016)

The Skin I'm In

Can you breathe on the moon?
She's shining down on me.
My release.
The wind helps me feel real.
Helps me notice the outer limits of my skin.
The skin I'm in.
Moon at dusk, kisses my melanin.
It glistens in the sultry wind.

Oya

Bringing sweeping change
The whirlwinds that sweep you up
That tough love
That you love to hate
But don't hate to love.
She drops in, real quick from above
Testing your balance, to see how sturdy
Is your foundation?
Have you put in work to step away from the nation?
Do they believe you as much without a citation?
It's ok love, you have meditation?
"Dance with me, stop thinking so much
Just let your mind go, let your body get in touch

Bow your head to your heart,
Acknowledge your resilient flexibility
To play in the wind, with true agility.”

Yit gadal
V'yit gadash
Shmei Raba

Axé

Swimming with the tinfoil fishes

Your mother gave you the gift of swimming.
You chose to swim with tinfoil fishes.
In a town where you could swim all day every day in the
summertime
It was there where you found yourself
Having tea parties on the bottom of the pool
Diving to pick up pennies to win the relay.
Hours of training your body and your breath
To cooperate in a rhythm.
You were learning all along, teaching yourself, the way you knew
best
That's what you do.
When your mind is left to fill itself in
You connect the dots into constellations of
What had happened that day
In your little mini getaway
Being alone with yourself,
Felt like being trapped at the time
But in retrospect, it really was your sanctuary
Your solitary meditations
Circle swimming,
Carrying the energy.
Swimming in circles with your ancestors,
Conjuring their do's and don'ts.
They taught you treading water was what you would do your whole
life
Only it was your body that knew it first
Up to you to transpose that knowledge to your consciousness.
Taught you how to react so quick, to heal,
And regulate your energy.
Now listen to her.
Young Raiye.

For she taught you well.

H Two O Two

Re-conceptualizing what it means to be human,
Filling the breath with life
Connecting with the breath,
our connection and thread to this earth,
that fills our body.
The air that brings energy and exchanges energy with our
environment and with others
Air filling in all the space that is not solid matter
Moving quickly and adaptably
Feeding our life systems
Holding and expanding in and under water
Allowing safe passage, and room for vibrations to resonate
As they tingle down to the bone
Floating and steering downstream
Where the river meets the ocean
Oxum meets Iemanjá.

Diaspora

We are connected
Our story weaves in the wind and the water
Steering our bodily vessels on the journey,
Winds carrying our sails
Not to be confused with sales
Where we pour our money on Black Friday,
Earned at the expense of our tired bodies
Because the Capitol, printed capital
Externalizing our worth into paper stacks that have no inherent
value.
We cannot eat it.
But we eat up their media
Invading our mediums
Mediums to sacred times and spaces
We know our places all too well
In the system that tears you from community
Selling the individual, making demands only possible through
invisibilized support
They climb an invisible ladder and stand up proud like they did it
alone
As I'm holding them up

While I'm swimming six feet under, treading
Blocking the backhand shot in the polo championship
The myth, the legend, not the sentient person.

So the myth of the Afro-mermicorn it is.
When I give a name to this magical being that is me,
you look at me like I'm crazy
But it is the way you treat me whether I am, or I am not.
So if I have to be uncomfortable,
Then so do you
Because I can hear my deep blue
And she's telling me all things true.

Remember
The exhale, heals.

Remember your fragmented being,
Remember everything you're seeing,
Remember the trauma of your dismemberment ,
Remember that you are heaven sent.
Into mind, into body, into spirit, dive in deep.
Remember it in your everyday walk, like in your sleep.
When you close your two eyes, so the third can see,
The memory wells up inside, of what it feels like to be free.

Breathe

Start with the breath.
Breathe in, breathe out.
Breathe in, breathe out.
Day in, day out.

You cannot live, if you cannot breathe,
But when you cannot leave,
How do you live?

Breathe in, breathe out.
Breath.
Breathe it into life.
Breathe it into existence.
Next time when you tense up or wince.
Take a breath in that instance.

Who is it that you're trying to convince?
Are they worrying about how you feel?
Does it matter if they believe it's real?
It's you, from in the inside out, that needs to heal.
Take a breath and be still, returning to your steady guide
Open up your lungs and your mind nice and wide.
Expand and contract in a rhythm that takes you for a ride.
Let the spirit world and yours collide.

Inherit the Wind

No, not the Scopes "Monkey" Trial.
But yes evolutionary.
Revolutionary.
Bodily library.

I inherit the wind.
The wind that tosses my locs.
The wind that sings, through the leaves in the trees.
I inherit the wind.
The wind that soaks the moisture from my skin.
The wind that reminds me to breathe.
I inherit the wind.

Long winded.
I am not.
But I know what I've got.
I know I am worth a lot,
I know about every battle I've fought,
I won't stay in this box to rot.

I inherit the wind.

Airress

I must confess,
I am an airress.
flying on the wings of my lungs
I inherit the wind.
Those are my stacks of gold.
They whisper the stories in my ears.
Helping to quell all of my fears.
The ones that well up inside

oceans flooded with my tears
they continue to deride my magic.

I am an airress.
So in this space I will reside.
Flowing with the ocean's tide
the currents whisk me up and
away.
Two parts hydrogen
to one part oxygen.
If only I could remember when
when I moved with ease
I swayed the breeze
when it wasn't so hard to breathe.
I am an airress.

Sunset

The sun set behind the trees,
Her beauty brought me to my knees,

She said, goodnight, see you again tomorrow.
Leave me with your hurt and sorrow.

My sister, moon, is here for you now.
So lie down your head, and wipe your brow.

Close your eyes and give into your sleep.
Let go my dear, it's ok to weep.

The sun sets behind the trees.
The wind danced between her leaves.

She breathed in the air and let her third eye see,
Gave her thinking mind a break, letting her body be free.

Let go of hurt she held within.
Reflecting light through her radiant grin.
Melting deep into her deep blue skin.
The sun set, it's time to begin.

Once I began to recognize my breath, and work with it, I began to think about that breath's dwelling in water. Our breaths are our spirits and our spirits dwell in our bodies, that are made up of mostly water. How does water shift and affect the way we move? How can the breath help us to re-member?



Figure 6: "Water" (roma|amor, 2016d)

Water

Water is how we quench our thirst, hydrate and nourish.

You can't go too far from water if you want to survive. Water holds our earth together in bodies of water and water in our bodies holds us together. We'd shrivel up if we did not have enough. Water is life. Water is soothing, it helps us to live another day, calming us, reassuring us. It refreshes and resets. Water is life's spirit. Water is how we regulate. Regulate our internal temperatures, how we maintain the fire at its ideal state. Water regulates our temperature through respiration and perspiration, distributing nutrients to the cells in our blood, helping to remove toxins. It lubricates our joints allowing us to move into the space we create. Water holds memory and helps to heal.

Water finds the path of least resistance and wears away at that path. It flows downhill with gravity. Gains power as it moves. It moves in cycles, in circles, it flows.

ACTION REFLECTIONS

There was a thirst I felt, a reason why I was being called to participate in the "African Diaspora of the Americas" program. My spirit was thirsty, more than the other parts of me. My first year of graduate school in the south of the United States dehydrated me, sucked my spirit dry. Moving in the Diaspora was a search for water, a search for nourishment for my soul.

Part of the coursework was visiting and learning about various Black women's work in Rio de Janeiro. Our class traveled to Nova Iguaçu to Ilê Omi Oju Aro, to hear the story of Mãe Beata de Iemanjá. I chose to collaborate with Mãe Beata to develop a project towards the first annual Black women's march of Brazil. I asked her what she envisioned

for the project, toward the march and she told me to plant seeds. Exactly what this meant at the time I was unsure, but I trusted her.

Mãe Beata de Iemanjá, helped to hydrate and nourish my soul, as she does for so many others with her powerful presence and wisdom. The orixá Iemanjá, is the mother of the ocean and life. Mãe Beata planted the seeds for the continuation of my work and quenched their initial thirst. She gave them life. Three of her takeaways that really stuck with me were “Don’t be afraid to speak,” “The sun is for everyone,” and “love is the foundation of everything.” I didn’t know it then, but the ideas had begun to grow inside, and the seedlings only then had begun to sprout. The more I gave thought to these ideas the more they continued to flourish. Giving them their time and space to breathe and continuing to find the other bouts of water to help them along. The first time I watered these seeds was with the conceptualization and making of the posters for the Black women’s march. I came up with concepts that depicted her wisdom seeds in visual form. I painted them, and shared them. I learned to share parts of me, my stories, for the sake of healing and finding myself.

Like water, I found the path of least resistance within myself. I worked on nourishing the ideas of twisting and bending in the break, I explored in the classroom. I found a way to exchange information, that would not drain me, for most energy exchanges leave me depleted. I created and held a healing space that invoked the crossing in its constitution. The crossing of fictive boundaries and the holding of diasporic space, to heal some of the arbitrary fissures expanded through singular written histories.

Singular written histories of U.S. climates traveled with me to Rio, challenged by similar singular colonially rooted histories of the Diaspora. I hydrated my body with Diasporic knowledges, finding more confluences and divergences. I used this water as one of my guide tools, nourishing other intellects, watering the seeds planted in their heads. Going with the flow helped me bridge experiential differences with students who were experiencing this location in the Diaspora for the first time. Moving in other spaces helped them become aware of their own movements, grow and expand their awareness, being mindful of difference but critical of borders.

Borders separated bodies, but our spirits found one another at my *Nossas Histórias* workshop. I felt a rehydration, a nourishment of the seeds that already had been planted within me. At this stage, I wanted to get feedback on how I was conceptualizing my developing pedagogical model, and sought to do so by sharing. Pedagogical tools need practice and input. Sharing is something that I'm not fond of until I feel secure in my ideas. It makes me vulnerable in a way that scares me, but hoarding the things I re-membered from my classes, as well as my daily experiences did not feel in alignment either. Sharing my process was the only real way for my work to be nourished, to give it room to grow.

Sharing, the way water has taught me to be fluid and collective. Expanding the limits of my skin to include the possibility and reality of other bodies in proximity, the ones that share my core energies. The yoga workshop was wonderful because it watered a seed that I often neglect. It was the practice of sharing a piece of my daily practice and process with other women of color. I started to practice yoga in my home, when I did not find resources to do so safely and comfortably on campus, or in the city of Austin. Practicing

on my own is great, but sharing practice with community feeds my soul in another way. It extends the skin you're in. I was extremely nervous to lead this space, as it was the first full yoga flow I guided. I shared with others in a formally planned way, and it felt okay, I could flow and breathe.

The fear continued as I took the stage in "Walking with Natasha" even though I always loved to perform on stage. It brings my nervous body a rush of adrenaline to know that I am in charge of the normalized spectacularization of my queer-Black-cis-woman body. Up until this point, my body had been craving a way to express itself, embody the discussions and organization of ideas that were happening in my head. Upon invitation to participate, my inclination was to accept, despite not knowing how it would work out with my schedule and knowing I would be producing this written thesis in the same period. The *fundamental elements* would not have been possible without the experiences in my body and on the stage. Although I was quenching my thirst for embodied knowledge production, the spirit hydrated my memory, to a degree I could not have foreseen. It charged with the momentum to flow through, finding the path of least resistance despite any turbulence that might come my way.

Turbulence is unforeseen and uncontrollable but we can use our alignment to work through these disturbances. I had an unsettled mind trying to force work into mediums and places it did not want to fit. I wanted my thesis project to embody a wellness workshop toolkit all in itself, but I found the written medium was too flat, fixed and static to accommodate Black women's dynamic theorizing and care. I thought of the many ways in which I could make this thesis a space of tool sharing. Coming up with no clear paths. The

provocation to think about literacy and memory as it connected to Black women's diasporic wellness through information coursework, was the piece I had been waiting for. I felt the importance of a toolkit workshop, and had not previously thought about an exhibition as a way to go about doing that kind of work. My dynamic toolkit could live in the exhibition *Moving Into Alignment* and reflect into this text. This idea received the nourishment it needed to grow. Once I had the idea of centering the exhibition around the energy centers of the body, the rest seemed to grow from there. *Moving Into Alignment* became the dynamic pedagogical tool I had hoped for. The undulation of memories into Diasporic harmony.

"A body of water inside me reminds me of oceans" – Jamila Woods

Where to begin

Sitting on the edge of the rock
My toes dip in, to test the waters
Sending chills up my shins,
Through my spine and to the heart
In the heart that lives in my chest,
Beating one beat at a time.

There's no one place to start a story.
Not when we are dealing with cyclical time
and the divine
Haunting.
The unarticulated presences
In the alleys of life.
The substance that
Thickened the air, making it difficult to breath in the 50-yard
freestyle,
My lungs collapsing at the finish.
Lost the race by a touch.
My mom told me I could have won.
But I couldn't tell her that

The asthma the doctor diagnosed me with was really the
Weight of my ancestor's smoke hanging in the air, crowding my
lungs, standing room only,
Albuterol lent no help,
As I
Slung my body through the cold water to the finish.
I couldn't tell her, because
I Didn't know.
I just knew I couldn't breathe.
A selective difficulty, appearing in some spaces and hiding in others,
feeding
Anxieties and fear.
Something I did not yet know couldn't be contained by the limits
Of my body.

Ripple Effect

Like the ripples on the face of the lake
I felt my insides begin to shake,
Little by little coming awake
Going with the flow; a give and take,
Dancing my way into the break
Relax, make way, your life's at stake
It's not something you can fake.
Dig deep, dig down, for spirit's sake.
Dance the undulations of the waves on the face of the lake.

Self-Care

Self-care is work.
You have to work to take care of yourself,
Just like you would work to take care of anyone else.
Nurture yourself,
Nurture your inner-child.
Let her run free and wild.

Self-care should not be a burden.
It is work, but should not be burdensome.
It should lighten your load.
Help you to do the heavy lifting.

Produce

They denied me access to my own body.

Tried to rip my soul right on out.
They cut the nerves between my organs.
They hoped that they could stop me from feeling.

They tell me time and time again produce,
re-produce,
produce,
re-produce.
The Black woman labors day in, day out.
Many of these labors go unnoticed and unvalued.
But all of this labor is in demand.
Laboring day in, day out,
with the expectation that the products of your own sweat
are never your own.

The body, mind and soul alike getting tired in their own ways.
Threat and fear of your fungibility imparted to break you down,
but you do not see it as so,
because it is not so.
Black bodies are not interchangeable.
Black bodies are attached to people.
Individual people who are grouped together by the color of their skin
denied access to their own bodies.

Today I, take back the key.
No gatekeeper can deny me my own body.
Because my body is a tree.
Growing over each and every wound they carve.
Persistent limbs, growing, twisting, adapting to the obstacles.

Today I drink the juice of the fruit I bare.
I can no longer bare to be un-free.
Today I chose to love me.

Suffocating Under Water

It feels like swimming in a room with small windows,

filling up from the bottom up. The water rises as I jockey to keep my chin above it. The current persistent, trying my strength and agility, to gain favorable position and stay afloat.

Flow, To-Go

"Do you want some flow to go?"

Oshum asked me, as I was admiring the curls in my fro.

No no! I'll have that flow to stay,

Right here, I'll spend my day today.

Inner Blue

Staying true, finding balance, feeling the inner blue.

Fire burning at its hottest, fed by oceans inside of you

Red from the readiness, your will and spirit brings

When your fire starts with blue,

The purple emanates through you.

Purple light, shining bright

Confronting elements of fright

Like the cape they think you wear

Thinking glitter falls from your hair?

Super human mystical creature

"OMG, We should use her for the feature!"

The Afro-mermicorn that wears a cape

"Look at her she's shifting shape"

Cloaked with ancestral wisdom,

In the sea's embrace

Taking my body entirely

I move with her rhythms,

Currents wave,

I wave at her currently

She releases me

Ignites the spark in the tree

Lights the herbs on fire

Let the smoke clear through the debris

To create a space for you and for me.

To the winds that fill my lungs,

The oceans that light my fires

The grounds that hold my story,

To the blue flame that finds a way to stay alive
To breathe
To shine with the simplest of needs.
Oxygen.

The Diaspora in the air
The way you've always known
When the weather changes,
Your knees tell you so

Water is how we were separated
But air is how we stay together.
The same winds blow on my face and yours
Currents carrying energy from you to me
I send it back to you when I breathe out
Hope you feel it like I do.

Tea

A collection of tools weaved together by their imaginative creation,
nodding to the experience in which they were steeped.
Like the tea leaves that read your future,
after the saturated water nourishes your body with caffeine and
magic.
Read like a constellation fixed in the universe of your cup,
opening up to the heavens and the portals of time travel.

Our bodies are conscious land, they are lands that require water to flourish. Without
water our lands waste away and become barren. We water the seeds we plant in our earth,
nourishing the roots we plant and the homes we make. Watching them sprout in their
season.



Figure 7: "Earth" (roma|amor, 2016b)

Earth

Earth is how we ground, stabilize and make home.

Earth is our will to stand our ground, using a push and pull simultaneously to keep our place. Earth is about teaching and learning, finding home. Our body is like a suit that our spirit takes, and we must wear it well. We must carry our bodies, help our bodies to carry us, for the body holds more than its weight. The body is an open circuit that is only able to close through moments of connection with nature.

ACTION REFLECTIONS

I had to find home within myself. Think about what it was about me that I considered to be home. What it was that I carried with me that made me feel like home. I felt that the movements I made were related to home and not in the sense of a physical place, rather a spiritual call I was pursuing. The energies of the terreiros grounded me in these calls. In the few visits my class had to these spaces, my energy felt more at home in my body. A pulling of my head out from the clouds down into the corporeal sensations of my being. I had a reference for understanding the energies that flow through me, returned from my roots, to my roots. They told me to dig deep, not for strength, but for wisdom. Let your heart be your anchor, the beat of your roots.

I dug deep to ground down, in the way I was told to. To share my healing process with the spaces around me. For they were needed there, in the places that were hurting me most. It was my hands that had the capacity to reach out and heal. The *Black feminist pause workshop* was a materialization and practice of the concepts, discussed in the classroom, which was a necessary challenge I was willing to face. Although I feared the outcome, the

wisdom I dug up rooted me. Sharing ideas in community, and getting feedback gave oxygen to my roots, understanding their current environment. Breathing, stretching and explicit conversation about community and self-care in our daily routines generated a lot of discussion and energy. How we find stability amongst turmoil and in spaces in which we are denied a genealogy or steady roots matters. Stabilizing in ever shifting places and spaces, rooting down in love, in our bodies, is how we keep balance.

Caring for my body every day is home maintenance. Maintaining delicate balances of energies and needs. I had to stabilize my everyday care to sustain energy to teach. The work that I was doing called upon many parts of me, emotional, mental and energetic for support. I needed to be grounded to guide my students through portions of their journeys. Physically guiding them through the movements of the city as well as guiding them through concepts in the texts we read for class. I needed to strongly connect with my guides, finding home within, to guide others in our crossings.

I had to think about my guides, intentionally making connections with them, to continue my healing work in a language that was not my first. Learning other colonial tongues and working with them to communicate the messages from my ancestors. I reflected on the idea of home in my heart when bringing my ancestors, particularly my grandmother into the framing of my story for this workshop. My grandmother, whose name I carry, guides my heart, gives me an internal beat to move to. I move to my inner rhythms, that feed me information so that I might care for myself and those around me.

I needed to continue caring for those around me, sharing, acknowledging the presence of other others and moving out of the isolation that graduate schools artificially

imposes on our lives. Through acknowledging each other's presences in the graduate student yoga flow session, we could create a space within another space. A space of healing and reassurance, not common in our everyday experience of graduate school. Fragments of constellations with enough energy to bend the air for a while, holding a bubble of recovery. We flowed, stretching, moving, breathing and jamming to the musical selections of SZA, was a magical energetic moment of grounding connection. It felt like home to be moving my energy in sync with other women of color who move to similar rhythms. I could fully exhale and root myself in our temporary space of recovery. Home was with us. Home was where we were.

I learned more about my home in my own body. How to use my momentum to hold space. How to engage my own pedagogies. Ananya Chatterjea's engagement with social justice choreography and commitment to women of color subjectivities and resistance can be felt through her pedagogical approaches to the classroom. Her visions of education and knowledge manifest in her teaching and in her pieces. This pedagogy explores the direct connection of the body and movement to social justice movement. What does it mean for your body to move and rub up against others? How does it react physically, when being so hyper-visible and invisible simultaneously? What does it mean to move in that resistance? How does that affect our health? We explored all prompts in our bodies, in our sacred space constituted with our energies.

An exploration of performing the dailiness of being, understanding the physical implications of violence through our physical-emotional response, "Walking With Natasha" taught us a different lesson each time around. Chatterjea's pedagogy is one of

crossing. One that helped me root my work in the space of the crossing. Exploring the questions prompted in my body. Women of color operationalizing their understandings of the world, transforming classrooms into sacred spaces that foster our understandings and honors our values, is a present possibility (Alexander, 2005, p. 8). Moving is my narrative, moving and telling our stories. Moving is a lived possibility, that feels good moving into the future. My story dwells in my body, simultaneously with those I once came in contact with.

“Certain moments send adrenaline to the heart
dry out the tongue and
clog the lungs.
Like thunder they drown you in sound.
No.
Like lighting, they strike you across the larynx.
COUGH.
When it happened, I was at a loss for words.
Haven’t you said this to yourself?
Haven’t you said this to yourself?

You don’t forget.
That might well be your fatal flaw,
Your memory.
Your vessel of your feelings.

Do you feel hurt because it’s the
‘All Black people look the same moment’?
Or
Because you are being confused with another,
After being so close to this other.
An other, after being, so close to the other.
Another after being so close to, this, other.
The other
Another
The other
This other
The other
The other

An other
This other.

....

Then the voice inside your head
Silently tells you to take your foot off your throat,
Because just getting along shouldn't be an ambition.
The body has memory.
The physical carriage holds more than its weight.
The body is a threshold across which each objectionable call
Passes into consciousness.
All the unintimidated, unblinking, unflappable resilience,
Does not erase the moments lived through.
Even as we are eternally stupid,
Or everlastingly optimistic.
So ready to be inside, among, a part of the games.
Nobody notices.
Only you've known it's just this.
You're injured" (Rankine, 2014)

These words still echo in my body. I performed them night after night for two weeks in the University of Austin's Dance Repertory Theatre's production *Momentum*.

The piece "Walking with Natasha" choreographed by Ananya Chatterjea, resonates deeply with me. Preparing for this piece I had been stuck inside of my head terrified to forget the words, or make a mistake for weeks. When we finally had an audience, I began to breathe deeper, feeling the responsibility and opportunity that was under my feet. I looked up from the ground and into the eyes of audience members and spoke to them. I implicated them in my message, making them shift in their seat. It was then that I realized the potential my work truly had. The moment when my theories felt grounded I had the power to teach in that moment. My body as my medium, I invoked spirit to walk with Natasha. Spirit guided me, and let me know there was no other place for me to be in that moment but present in my body, with them.

To stay present in the body, we must ground down and lift up our energies. To balance these energies, we must know about what they are and how they move. *Moving Into Alignment* is grounded in the healing energies and entities already present in Austin. A locally specific diasporic exhibit, this dynamic healing workshop is another future possibility for constellating healers. Healing comes from the ground, so women with contact and movement on the ground locally are the keys to grounding Diaspora. Diaspora means there is connection, not uniformity. Working with the energies already in Austin, my work in curating this exhibition was to pull these energies together into a constellation that shapes a larger healing space and resource; one greater than any single star alone. Grounding the ancestral healing energies around me, not trying to create new but rather renewed spaces of connection, that was the work.

Prayers

The intentional focused energy
Prayer is talking to yourself and everyone else,
Coming in fragments
Washing up on the shores of your back
You hold the weight creatively, balancing
Adjusting on the fly.

North, South, East, West
Wind, Earth, Fire, Water
Mind, Youth, Elders, Spirit
Centered in my heart
My light, my love.

I found myself at home: Quilombo and the Portable Black Self

Nascimento's moves through time and space to meet me where I am.
I meet her where she is.
We meet each other in the crossing.
To form another constellation.
A constellation beyond nations.

Moving to the vibrations of the atabaque.
Drum beats, call us out of orbit.
Transporting me, in and out of my body.
I did not know where I went,
But I found myself at home
I know I'm not alone
Ever.
No matter the weather.
Rain or shine,
we come to grind.
In my portable Black self.
They tell me take care of your health,
That's the real wealth.
Because home is where the heart is
And my heart lives in my chest
Gotta feed it with the breath
No time to contest
What spirit tells me is best
Take time to relax and rest
Nothing more nothing less
You don't need to stress
You are contesting but
This is not a contest
Quilombo.
I found myself at home.
Keep your practice close to you
Tap into your inner blue
We know it's hard we'll carry you through
Just move with the rhythm you know is true.
No, it's real, it's nothing new.

Seeds

Plant more seeds
Plant anything
Finish your apple
Throw the seeds on the ground
How can I honor the earth today?
I can call (her) my mother
Honoring the earth is honoring myself
My child like energy
What art can I create today?
What makes me more unafraid to create art?
Do those things

Our ancestors are the earth.

Let your body catch up to your mind
Slow down from the hustle and the grind
You have it all right here with you
Tap into your inner blue.

Bloom

Wait for me to bloom,
By the twilight moon,
Histories mark themselves on my body,
Through rhetorical repetition,
It's their mission.

Boogie

Boogie you have seen me grow,
We grew up together.
You remind and
Help me to remember
The child in me
That youthful energy
The one that is more carefree
She could truly see
She saw what the serpent
whispered in her ear
About the need to plant her feet in the ground
Like seeds that would turn to trees
Through conscious roots
Alimented with sweet waters
On the tongue left dry
From the breath trapped outside.
Air stagnant in the lungs
Suffocated by the words you say in passing
Consequences like energies that are only transferred
Onto my body, socially constructed to be fulfilled by me
Your goal for me to never be free
We shall see, we shall see.
Boogie, I got you and I know you got me.

Embodying my altar

My body is a library

The history is memory
Blood memory running
Through my veins like rivers
Rivers running in
Their own rhythm
And time
Upstream
To the heart space
The home place
Running down in the root race
As I trace my body with my hands,
Feeling the sleeve cover my shoulder,
When I hold her
our volumes combine

Accompanied by Exú at the fork in the river,
Teaching us that currents flow differently
Changes are a possibility.

Love as a tender flame,
put out in childhood.
Ignite that flame

Memories in dreams

Displaced memories
Other people's memories
Ancestors coming through dreams

I don't remember how it feels to love freely
Without the anxiety building in my womb space
Creeping up into the heart space

My childhood, it comes in flashes
It is fleeting
But my body
Remembers to swim
But does not know rest as it should
I don't remember what my favorite color was
And what I liked to play
Playing in the wind
The memories get torn away.

Bodies of memory

Bodies in memory
Memories in bodies
Water, air, from the universe
Return to her
Resuscitate her

Writing myself into a place called home

Her blood, she could taste the metallic flavor on her tongue.
She wanted to drink it like water.
Because the blood memory ran deeper,
Hydrating her mind in ancient realities
She was intrigued by this taste,
suckling to remember the taste of loss.

Blood memory.
The deeper callings that drive us.
In our subconscious they move us.
They guide us,
So when people ask how,
And I say I don't know,
It's in my blood.
In my flesh.
In my bones.
That's what it is.
My ancestors guiding me with micro movements
And vibrations
That continue through our cells.
We sense it but cannot point to it
Intangible tactilely
But felt very much so in the body
Sensing those energies and messages from the trees.

Her blood coursed through her veins like rapids, shooting out
Off the cliff
Falling
Belly flopping into the river below
Flowing downstream with such ferocity and momentum
Letting go
Guided on its course
But free enough to move as it pleased.
One fluid body,
Heavy and powerful
But gentle and precise.

Blood changing forms to heal and congeal.
Strongly clasping onto one bank and then the other.
Holding on the only way it knows how
So strong
Yet so fragile
Ready to crack with any real force.

Annoying encounters about my last name

How do you say your last name?

Ah-deh-leh-yeh.

Where are you from?

Earth.

No, but like your name?

My father's family.

So where are they from?

Earth.

No, but like what country?

Nigeria

That's so cool! That makes so much sense, I knew you weren't from here.

What do you mean?

You know what I mean

No. I don't.

awkward silence

Articulate

You must articulate, through so much hate,
hustling to bear the weight
of the expectations of multiple nations to fit a mold,
take your stance then hold,
hold still indefinitely,
But your definition requires recognition
Recognition of your creative vision.
Visions of the future,

rivers diverging into the tributaries of the past
Nothing was ever made to last,
Not forever anyways just enough to hold the space in time,
Serving as a home in transit, in the meantime.
And your movements, time and space align.

Oma Rain

My niece
God child of mine
indeed you are
You came to visit us
from amongst the stars
Traveling on the night of a storm
You were storm-born
To a queen of this earth
Auriel
The Golden Lioness
Making way to
To the universal rains
Lighting the eternal flame
Inside your heart
Igniting the love that
Sinks deep in your bones
Holding all the memory
The herstory, the mystery
To flood your flesh with the tingles
That tell you we are here
No need to fear
Just close your eyes,
It's crystal clear
The love you feel
Will help you heal
Will help you grow
Yes, steady and slow
Feel that pace
It's no race
But just in case
Life's too hard to face
Just breathe in
Then breathe out
Wash away all your doubt
Trust the sun on your face,

And the moon in your hair,
Walk with intention and grace,
We will always be there.
In the air,
in the water,
in the soil,
in the fire
Use your heart
Ground in love
Oma Rain from above.

Body Scan Meditation

Think of a story about your feet
Feel the energy move up through the ankles
and feel them from the inside out.
Up through your legs connect to that energy as it moves up into your
knee
The joint, and connecting point to the legs.
The highway.
The thoroughfare.
The amounts of traffic differ
So feel the shape of your legs
From the inside out
Up into your pelvis
Which holds lots of knowledge
Maybe it doesn't all feel good and it's a lot
Possible trauma
But just recognize it
Acknowledge it is there.
Steps
First step
Just step in
Breathe
Into your stomach
The solar plexus
Up into your mid-section
Feel breath fall in
Feel the ribs holding and giving structure to that section.
How flexible and expandable that section is
To make room for breath
Air
Life
Up into your chest where the heart lives

Feel it beat
Heed that knowledge
Let it flow consciously through your bloodstream
Like water in a river
Holding all the potential of future possibilities and all of the memory
of our ancestry and herstory.
In this space arise knowledges coming together like currents in the
ocean causing systems of great power,
Moving directional flow also guided by the moon herself in all her
glory and the stars with whom she flirts even when we don't see her.
Up into your throat
Feel space
relax
Release the tension of always almost speaking
Vocal chords just resting
Inside
Into your head
Face and scalp
Releasing tension and looking at yourself inward out
Feel Órí and energy
Feel shoulders arms and hands and fingers
Appendages helping through the world
Draw from the earth and ground down

Recognition
Re-cognition
Re-do the cognite
Prior existence

Just step into the room
Breathe
Be still
Listen
Feel the vibration
The temperature change
Work in resonance
In harmony
In unity
In this space or contradiction is where I live
In this space
Where I act all day
The different parts
That I have learned to tokenize,
Hiding in plain sight at the cost of my true freedom

Boxes I check, but are certainly not sufficient
Recognition of me, My recognition
I am re-arranging the cerebral to incorporate into my body and spirit.
Because together they pray.

I am a negotiation of nation,
perverse, unintended consequence of colonialism, imperialism,
capitalism
That you now have to deal with.

So our bodies are the first things we need to address
Our entrance point, point of access to this world on earth.
A portal, a threshold.
Our bodies attract and push away energies influencing our daily
movements
Now our spirits are attached to our bodies
Connected by the breath.
Marking our arrivals and departures
Linking our spirit to the body that serves as the Black dwelling
place, the home space

Now these bodies on this earth are majority water
With air
Balancing the rest
What is it like to dwell in water?
Memory and time move differently
Blood flowing like rivers, educating my bodies, bringing oxygen to
feed my vessel
Air and diasporic space,
Water and the root race.

This balancing game puts me to the test
Hard to really rest, and I can't contest
I'm just tryna be the best
I make my home into a nest
So comfy I don't want to leave
Getting lost in my homey reprieve
Kick back and hang in the trees
Reflecting on the moon, or is she reflecting on me?

Reflecting on what it means to be
To be human
A Black woman in my every earth-day

My spirit walking in the earth way
Time marked by each passing birthday.
Feeling the resistance of going against the fray
But it's the only way
In the day-to-day
To get by
When all I'm tryna do is fly
Or swim into space
My home place, the heart space, in the root race,

Ôrí, light, head
Lightheaded

Feel the deep blue vibrations in your teeth.

Look Up

We often have forgotten to see.
We walk around so numb, not fully aware, because it is too painful.
Re-member to look up and see the beauty you project from within.
Let your light shine bright like the sun.
Look up, they have not yet won.

O'Lola'Ade

Mama Baba mi monifere.
Mother of my father I have abundant love for you.
For you are me and I am you.
Every day, this becomes more true.
I can feel the ways you want me to move.
Even if I fight it, know that I can hear you.
My heart beats to the rhythm of your feet
In passing time.
I carry the honor and majesty of your reign.
Your spirit resides within me.
I speak your lessons loud
And they become clear,
Like the crystals that adorn my neck,
Carrying the energy of many suns and moons.
All I've ever wanted is to make you proud.

When I listen, I know you will speak to me
Sitting close to the root at the base of this tree.
Rooting down and sitting up

Closing my eyes, to interrupt
The pace I've grown accustomed to
Slowing down to the heart you beat
I feel your grace, I feel complete
Completing the circuit of my body with your energy
You help me to remember
You give me your plea
You remind me to be kind to myself
That your ancestors have been here before
Not to let empty ships knock you off course
Rather listen to yourself, stop using so much force
You have a natural inkling that you need to trust
Water the seeds, give them air, for they will be robust
You are not alone, never have been, never will be
Just sit down and feel your heart beat under this tree.
Mama Baba mi
Monifere
No one can break our eternal bond.
In between galaxies of stars, we hold on.

Trees

Trees animate me.
I breathe their breath
And they breath mine
A symbiotic intertwine
Divine planning
They constantly are reaching
Teaching.
Healing their own wounds and renewing their own life.
Showing me how to get through strife.

Green Veins In A Tree

Stop and see the reality
It's reflected back in you and me.
Give yourself permission to slow down
Reach down and touch the ground.
Listen to her, knowledge profound.
Feel the vibrations all around.

Dangerous

Be careful who you let whisper in your ear.

Don't let them fill your heart with fear
You know your purpose, though it may not be clear
Sharpen up all your tools, as you would your spear.

Don't let them fill your head with lies
Don't let them leave you terrified
No seedling, keep moving, don't be petrified
Let your roots soak up the tears you've cried.

Cry your heart out, let the moisture soak into the ground
Remember your ôri has always been crowned
Your light shines so bright you always astound
Don't worry about them they'll come around.

If they don't, that's not on you, you know where your truths sit.
Learn to rest when it it's hard, you're too legit quit.
Girl you know, Black girl magic is always lit
Just take it one thing at a time, bit by bit.

White Noise

Cannot kill inner joy
Having been a Black woman moving through various white
educational spaces throughout my life,
I have encountered many challenges and traumas.
What has been consistent across all of these spaces,
is the lack of concern and support for my daily survival.
I would find my refuge in sports and extracurriculars,
although those to become violent spaces of projected expectations
and tokenization.

Let us pause and breathe.
Take up space with our conscious breath,

Cycles and circles
Turned around and spun about

Balance
Find your center, your core, the point at which you can pause and
breath
Take a step-back, hear the white noise, the background noise
Where your

Daily meditation, affirmation, confirmation,
Intention, sprouts
Patience within yourself.

Digital Technology

Technologies are not all digital.
Although that's what we think today
That digital and new are equated with better and future.
My futurity is rooted in my past, simplification.
Tools you can't see, but you use to reach the depths of your being,
Where smart phones cannot reach.

Look to yourself, your inspiration, for innovation,
Look past the nation, leap into the waters or over them in flight
It's a struggle of love in this here fight
So spread your wings and shine your light
In all of your splendid delights.

Come out of the auto mode and
come back into the present
using the tools you are constructing.
Talk about how we navigate and find short cuts that are not
necessarily the healthiest but they get us through.
Let's use tools to address the roots and find our roots and pull from
those
to ground us from within instead of
from the massive media that floods into your psyche,
unapologetically, without consent.
We must filter and allow us the right to process and build out from
within. Finding that light in the depths, regardless of the orientation,
like in water or in space, you are suspended and your orientation is
yourself. You, moving creating as your body has a different gravity
that you can carry and tap into.
Air flows in a different manner in water and space,
altering vibrational levels and
vibrations of energy
that ping back and pong forth into and out of our space realms.
Waves crashing into the milky way and surfing through.

Gemini Air, Vatta, Cosmic Connectivity.
Diasporic constellations.
Pre and post digital.

Our bodies, our homes are constantly on the move. What is the motivation behind our movement? As we grow older with each passing day our bodies are always changing. Never the same when we wake up, as when we fell asleep. The only constant we have in this world are our bodies and change. What drives the changes we see in ourselves and in the Planet? How do learn to view life as a never-ending process of change and carry our energy through?



Figure 8: "Fire" (roma|amor, 2016c)

Fire

Fire is how we find motivation and sustain our energy.

Fire is constant change. It is dynamic and alive. The life force. Fire is at our core, providing us warmth and light, much like the sun. The sun is a burning ball of gas, fire, keeping the planet earth in its rotation, the passing of time. We move in cycles around the sun, revolving around fire. Fire is the gravitational pull at our core. The molten lava at the center of our earth, like the fire in our bellies. Fire is the life in you.

ACTION REFLECTIONS

Although I did not know where to start, I could feel that I was on a journey moving toward myself, and the work that was meant for me. I wanted to keep going, keep pursuing the roots and routes before me. Seeing how they intertwine with one another at the base. Following the path laid out before me, was my best option. I learned more about myself, gaining hints about how to better work with, not against myself.

Working with myself to fuel, to keep going, to learn more about myself and to repeat this very cycle. The more I learned the more I could share, the more I could exchange, the more I could wholly engage. Engaging in spaces that give me anxiety in their structure, became a healing practice. Creating a healing space, a *Black feminist pause*, was not something I had foreseen nor planned. Intervening in the structure of a conference by ending it with a *Black feminist pause* workshop, wrapped up that space with constructive implications for future possibilities.

Driven by the possibilities of the work, I challenged myself to prove my potential to myself. Trying out new domains to see how the skills I have acquired apply. I had never

been a TA before, and the first time I was trying was in a Diasporic Classroom space. My responsibilities required skills of different modalities, from theoretical classroom debates, to procedural every-day activity in another country. I taught our students inside of the classroom and out. It tested the entirety of my person. It challenged how I put my pedagogies into action. I had practice finding teaching moments in an intentionally diasporic space, bringing my theories closer to the ground. My inner sun kept me going as I simultaneously planned another workshop.

The teaching moments from “African Diaspora in the Americas,” reminded me of the importance and of embodied healing work. From the many Black women’s stories we learned about in the process, I was compelled to tell my own. Never really liking to talk about myself, I had not wanted to make myself vulnerable to share. I learned about the importance of storytelling and its ancestral cycles as well as the importance of writing our own stories from Helena Teodoro and Iléa Ferraiz. Amongst other participants in the program, these Black women’s stories illuminated the importance of the process. Their stories carry seeds of wisdom. I realized that I needed to share in the chance that others would pick up seeds from my tales as well. The stories in me sustained me, fueled me to find the connections in my own story. It was only through my story that information, storytelling and self-care came into conversation. I found a sustaining energy from this workshop. The crossing of fictive borders became a little bit clearer for me. The healing work knew no borders, only bodies.

Recalling the feeling of holding healing spaces, helped motivate me move through the fears I had of leading workshops and validating my ability for sharing healing with

community. The exchange of the *Black feminist pause*, circled its energy back through my body, reminding me that one pause was, and is not enough. A pause is not a luxury, it is a necessity, so it was up to me to share. I walked with the energy from iterations before, feeling how the energy flowed through this gathering of women of color. The sun in my solar plexus got a boost from another confirmation that folks need these spaces.

I hold space well, but have trouble letting space hold me. It feels like I'm always pushing outward like a starfish holding onto breathing room as the walls cave in. When I was able to leave my body and see spirit perform through me. It was a free feeling of space holding me. I let the space hold me, I learned to let go. Letting go is the only way you make space to let something new come in. I walked with my sisters and my ancestors held me. I learned to balance, fall back, let go a little more, carrying my momentum through. Momentum, it was more than just the title of the show, it really is what is carrying me through. It sustains my hopes for futures possibilities, where performing my work is how I share most.

The performance was a tool that taught me how to share. It helped me work on letting my mind, share my body and soul. It taught me to not be afraid to speak, to confront what hurts. To look people in the eye and let them know my pain, not to back away, but rather to lean in. Momentum has carried me through my writing process. It reminds me that the body is the vessel for memory. Communicating through the medium of my body holds just as much, if not more weight than using writing as the technology. When the mind needs to rest the body takes over, using muscle memory to carry you through. The body

does a lot of work for us and we must always take time to slow down and not take it for granted, to give thanks.

Not taking our bodies for granted requires knowledge of how they work and how to work with them. This knowledge is not readily accessible to everyone. Curriculum about how the body works is usually learned in anatomy class, where bodily sentience is left out. We move so fast and rarely slow down to listen to all the information our bodies give us. Part of my personal wellness required slowing down from the pace graduates school has me moving. I was driven by my own process of learning to listen to my body, so that I may better work it. Learning memory in my body drove me to think about the energy that holds it there, about how energy moves through the body. The body is the vessel of feeling of memory and energy that animates those memories. *Moving Into Alignment* is fueled by this energy, it is a manifestation of all the moving parts that construct healing constellations. Constellations of healers teach people about how to care for self. Only through community can we better understand ourselves, our part of the whole. The different energy centers of the body help us align to be better versions of ourselves. It is a collective individualized activity, for every body moves differently.

I see you

I see you on the horizon, when you rise with the sun
Baruch ata adonai, elocheinho melech ha' olam asher kidishanuh bo
mitzvo tav vitzivanu l'chadlichner
I light your fire from right to left
Reminding me you haven't left
But are right here
When your flames dance in a duet
Weaving and waving in and out.
Mesmerized

My open eyes
Shut to feel the warmth of your glow
I see you.

Sun Beads

Xangô beads around my waist
Burst into a thousand pieces
They scatter, I gather
Like the aspects of myself
Restrung, reconstitute, re-member
The fire of the sun
Revolving around your waist.
Raiye-diating.

The Core

Focusing not on combating in opposition,
But responding by loving ourselves
And implementing what we know to be true.
Not to disprove their way of knowing,
But to assert ours, our inner blue hue.

Ancestors

Plant a seed and grow a tree.
My ancestors inspire me to keep going.
They tell me to find home and do it for community.
Just like the tree, you'll keep on growing.

Without air we cannot breathe

They put their hands on my ancestor's throat
They threw her into the belly of the boat.
She opened her mouth, gasping for air.
They looked away, they did not care.

She laid down for weeks, muscles atrophied
But in her heart, she carried the seeds.
For when she stepped her foot on solid ground
Roots crept down through her spine and she was found.

Without air we cannot breathe

But our soul tells us to believe.
Never letting us down when we search for the light,
Feeding oxygen to our fire, so we may forever burn bright.

Brown Goddess

Fire in her eyes
She had me mesmerized
Memorized.
My every intricacy, she could see
Reflected her light upon me.
All six eyes closed in on me.
Beautiful goddess and her family
She radiated the light of her ancestry
A tapestry I could feel
Woven with care and time, to help us heal.

Black (Girl) Magic

I heard that Black (girl) magic is dark, that it is evil
How is that so, when it's a form of knowledge retrieval?
It makes me so mad, the earth responds with upheaval
It can't possibly be that my magic is evil.

You see, my Black (girl) magic is real, it comes from the heart
It is the only place there is to start.
I know that I am agile and really smart,
Like a gem fusion, always together and never apart.

Despite what they try to convince me is true
I listen closely to my inner blue hue.
My heart, she gives me all the cues.
She tells me I don't have to choose.

Yes, I swim and play water polo, all of this is true
I am an Afro-mermicorn, see the tints of purple hue
Yes, my Black (girl) magic involves lots of water,
Water is life, Black (girl) magic taught her.

Deep shades of purple and teal
are part of the deal,
as are the locs that curl out of my head,

reaching in all directions,
using echolocation to locate my body in time and space,
the ocean is a vast place, incomprehensible, and full of life.

I am here in the flesh, a magical reality
Setting my inner child loose, letting her be carefree.
I am so magical, I get two, not just one degree.
My hands hold the potential to manifest forests of trees.
I know my tomorrow is not a guarantee,
But I will wield my Black girl magic, and refuse to not be me.

Your Place Matters

Use your position to challenge the standards even if just for a moment.

Spiritual Activism

We need to change the way we frame our activism.
Energies act through crystal prisms
To heal our bodies we've worked all day
It's ok to grieve but also play.
I never considered myself an activist
One that went out in the streets with a raised Black power fist
My actions did not align with this type of display
I prefer to heal and pray.
We see activists as those in the streets
at rallies and protests and sending tweets
My way of activating is when spirit talks to me
Tells me to share the seeds, that fall from our tree.
My spiritual activism is my love and my light.
In the way dreams carry you through the night and fright.

Lit

We need to fully arrive
Slow down to a time that feels good in your body,
one of the plants,
of our ancestors,
feel the cycle and the circle.

Light your light
And stay lit.

Fire is our constant change, it fuels our unconditional love. The fire that sits in our bellies is fueled by the oxygen harnessed from the breath, heating the water in our bodies, nourishing the roots that our bodies grow. The elements feed off of one another, finding love in the process of constant change and growth.

Return to Love in the Crossing

Don't be afraid to tell everyone that the sun is for everyone and love is the foundation of everything. Love is where I began my journey and where I return to. Love has helped me through the violent moments as well as the peaceful ones. It has helped me to appreciate every moment, and not take for granted my next breath. Love is the driving force, the balancing energy that humans can tap into to create their dreams. Love is the guiding force in the crossing, the dwelling place of memory, where we walk with our ancestors and where they walk with us.

Post-election

I knew since Monday morning.
I mean someone whispered in my dreams, and my body told me
when I woke up.
Overwhelming sadness, washed over me like a giant wave.
Crashing down into my chest, making it hard to breathe.
Calmly letting it settle, not panicking, just noticing.
The energies lingered in the air, in need of a sage cleansing, but they
are stronger than that.
They need more than you alone.
They need you to dig deeper than ever, ground down and take full
account of your home.
Your body, your home.
Your body, your territory
Your body, your landscape.
Your body, your document.
Your body, your archive.
Your body, your memory,
Your body, your re-memory.
Your body, re-covery.
Your body, your home.
The re-memory is what my body told me.
It remembered exactly how it mourned the last time.
Running through my bloodstream, the memories coursed around.
Cells talking to one another, networking, spreading trauma like
rapid fire.
We must navigate through, working to find ourselves whole by the
end of the day.

Work of the Imagination in Manifestation

Claudia Rankine, spoke to me before she spoke to me.
Her words introduced to my ears by the voice of Ananya Chatterjea

Ananya spoke to me through her words,
In my ear, chirping like birds.
I read them, as I embodied their meaning,
My cells vibed well, continued their gleanings.
As part of a project that I'm doing to save my life,
Because of a class that I took to save my life,
Here I am doing the work to save my life.

I had read the words she wrote,
Felt them enter and move in my body,
As they exit the back of my throat,
It wasn't me speaking, but it was she.
Traced the words to their origin
to find the reason why they resonate within me.
Went to the park and prayed at the base of the tree.
I have heard them before,
Uttered in another tongue,
Another time,
Another rhyme
Still ringing through,
Ringing true.
Bringing truth.
I heard her voice and I was the person next to her,
next to them.
When things grow in systems,
You follow the systems to their roots,
To the heart of the operation.

Recognition in the day to day
Requires walking in a mindful way.
A practice of noticing, tuning into the time, space, environment
around you.
That's called tapping into your inner blue.
Exercising muscle memory.
Attempting to close the eyes and still be able to see.
To bob and weave the daily treachery.
Using tools to navigate purposefully.

Confusing interlocking matrices of power
Construct your every waking hour
Preaching from the top of the ivory tower
Drop toxins in the ocean, turning her sour.

The universe feels, even when we cannot

She knows when your feelings get caught
She reminds you of lessons you've already been taught
Reminding you that you just forgot.

So re-member your body holds universal knowledge
No, not what they try to teach you in college.
Even when you have been led astray,
Take a deep breath in, and live your way.

“A disremembering of the thing that had happened the minute before
as if it hadn't happened” (Detroit Public TV, 2015)
Fracturing our realities, momentary media moments
A replacing of bodies, one death upon another
No concern for their mother.
Her love, a revolutionary act.
It's so matter of fact.
That they forget that we imagine ourselves into tomorrow.

Mentee

Love at your most vulnerable.
Sharing with others what you practice in your day to day
Sway, sway, even when the sky is grey.

Imposter syndrome ousted using the power of your womb
Drawing energies from the tombs
Calling and re-calling
Your ancestors
To help shed light
Shine bright
Like a beacon of hope
My ancestors' wildest dreams couldn't conjure me
I am free
When I fly
Suspended by the waters in vast galaxies
Sending intentional waves of hope, singing through the trees.

Self-Protection

Amazonite and African Turquoise beads
Lay around my neck
Circling moons and planets
In the universe

I hold her around me reflecting the moon's energies
Infinitely through my spirit
Making waves that rush down
Flooding my womb space with light
To wake my spirit's purpose
Through the pathway Exú has given way
To challenge me to be my best
Giving me the tools and life force
To sense the vibrations
In my feet through my heart
To my crown connecting earth to sky,
My life breath
Enters my lungs
Moving restored life to my soul.

Bom Dia

Brigada por más um dia nessa terra mãe
Desde lua, até o mar
Atravessando as montanhas pra chegar no rio,
Até seu coração eu corro
Voando, correndo, floating in your embrace
I trace the universe around the curves of my hips
Shooting rays out of my soul
Through the soles of my feet in the ground
Radiating sun energy to your core
Where you store it all for nightfall
To reflect it back at the moon
Making all folks swoon
In your graceful presence
Basking in your essence
So effervescent.

Things to Remember...

Prayers to my younger selves.

I have always been treated like a myth.
Always super-humanized.
Tokenized.
Immobilized.
Traumatized.
My body was trained to move through spaces
So mundanely violent,

No one but me
Noticed that I had to figure it out on my own.
Praying to my ancestors through Hebrew prayers
But feeling them most when I was in the pool swimming.

Swimming was a gift my mama gave me.
The pool was your therapy, your sanctuary.
Where your body could just be.
It allowed me a glimpse of what it's like to be
Free.
Taught me how to move efficiently
How to breathe
1,2,3.
Alternate side-breathing.
To maximize the freestyle's capacity.
Reciting your Torah canting melody
Lap after lap, for you were off to...

Hebrew school.
Back to the performance
Where you were receiving a miseducation
When
All along
What you were perceiving was real
You could feel it
In your bones, and in your body
You walked with it every day,
Vibing your way through
Situations thrown your way
Because you were taught to react,
Deep in your cells,
Your physical body contracts
To opposing energies,
They've been conditioned that way
Your mind may be making sense of the systems
But their times are very different.
It is up to you to mend and bend
Your time and space
To where your body aligns with your mind
Finding the rhythm, making your space
Implementing your own grace
Gracing the world with your light
Shining bright, breathing in
Breathing out to the wind

Hear the blue inside you
Feel the sun on your face
Taste the rivers that feed you
It's ok, find your pace.

Hear the rhythms that feel right
Let your body tell you how to go
Close your eyes, trust your true sight
It will never fail,
You'll always know.

Feel the wind, hear them whisper
In the spaces we are moving through

Only I am lifted through the energy entering my soles
Drawing me up, grounding me down
Holding up my light and crown
To align my body to the divine
Rhythm of time
Allowing me to move through
"homo oeconomicus time"
With a grasp on another reality
A presently future possibility
Combining what has been taught to me
In all the many ways that make me a myth.

Black girl be in a bubble
Because you had to play the game
With tactics you pulled together on the fly
"Inside, among, a part of the games,"
You played the way you had to play
That's not your fault,
A systemic environment
Either you give into their expectations for you
Or have them trash your reputation.
Computations, memorizations,
Deep vibrations choose you.

Earth to Raiye

Am I in outer space? Or the depths of the ocean floor?
All I hear is deep blue,
I hear it in my heart and I feel it in my eyes.
My eyes comprise the sound of vibration,
the sound of silence, the sound of echo.

I'm an alien from inner space.

Deep inside is the ideal place,
I find home
I make home

Earth to Raiye Earth to Raiye
Today is Thursday,
Are you ok?
Healing is a return of the feeling of being whole
Divine (re)connection
The mirror of reflection
Dismantle, re mantle,
Put love and light out
into the air

The Crossing

I can breathe at the crossroads.
My heart fills me with love.
With light.
I am my own guide.
They animate my body and move me.
I get the feeling that
Another world is possible.
That standing on the brink
Favors my leaning in.
Diving in.
Seeping in.
Cascading down.
Flying sideways.

Can I Get a Break?

I get to class early
Set down my backpack
Take out my notepad
Settling into the classroom, to make a space,
to find a comfortable place, from which to speak
Praying to my ancestors to help me participate in class today.

The trajectory for the class laid out in the syllabus.
Classes are not smart to miss

it's a fight to show up because home, with its warm embrace brings
such bliss

'Cuz every time I speak I feel dismissed
Or rubbed the wrong way by the "yea, I hear you sis,"
(Do you hear me or are you even listening?)
Nah, you just wanna hear me sing.

Daydreaming, yet present, I think I got the gist
I keep writing my lists, instead of clenching my fists

From the angst that builds up in the ivory tower
from the first tick of the hour
Until the last tick of the third.
I let my dreams serve as wings that carry the bird.
Up into the clouds, or maybe near the ocean floor
I can breathe and I can move.
Coordinates?
I'm not too sure
In between,
in the cracks,
where most see the need to smooth it out
I find a space which is sacred,
more intuitive,
where I feel less doubt.

Leaves

Things fall away, they fall in, they fall out.
Things unfold in drafts and versions,
shifting over time,
through time,
through space,
in space,
we trace,
the past to the future,
with the alphabet of our bodies,
connecting the dots,
into constellations,
our foundations.

Transmigrations.
Leave, leaves.
Leave, leaves.

Balance

Hold still
Grab energy through your body.
Let it move through and send it back to close the circuit.
Energy moves like electricity, through me, electrically
May she sway in the breeze, all the tree and their branches extending
to their leaves
One thing at a time, slow down, be still, organize the shape of your
consciousness in love
Map out the boundaries of love
Let it run down the rivers of your veins into
the tributaries that pool in your ankles
feeding your roots
electrically
eclectically
picking up all you've learned from moving around
grooving through sound
finding meaning profound
sorting through to feel what resonates, vibrates
let it out when you sing
it's all in the hands
how you meet the demand
for your magic and light
rub your palms together
build the heat
feel it sink into your skin
feeding the fire that roars like oceans so fierce and loving
protecting her kin
that share her skin
roaring and cycling
her melodies resonate deep inside of me
running into my roots
to remind me
the memories of being free
of soaring
gliding high
airborne for a moment
my spirit breathes and starts to fly

I hear the trees call out to me.

Continuing Movement

I have only begun to explore the depths of our connections and balance with self, others and nature. Only through repetition, reiteration and exploration will we be able to move efficiently in the crossing. I started with love and how I found my way to breathe through love for myself. Breathing reminded me I needed to drink more water and nourish myself. I realized water hydrated my body my home, my land. I needed to keep my home going, motivated and energized. I had to find my fire, my love, my core.

I have touched upon but not explored the proliferation of media in its relation to circulation and navigation of our world. Media plays a crucial role in how we view ourselves, how we view the world and how we relate to ourselves, others and our world. Medias uses language and other technologies to circulate narratives and dominate discourses. It works alongside capital, controlling the futures we can see. It has become so strong that it has moved across borders while simultaneously enforcing them It uses air to move beyond them. It polices borders and images and circulates the visions we have for the world. Media linked with capital is dangerous, we must be critical of our relationship with it as we are with our relationship with capital, recognizing neither are inherently bad.

I have shared pieces of what I know, even when only in fragments. This work is not a finished product but rather work in progress. It is food for thought and imagination. I want to leave my process visible, by leaving fragments in my text, to show the continuous incomplete nature of our work. Other pieces will be re-membered, expanding our constellations of knowledge. We must continue to teach ourselves, to expand conversations with one another to imagine and manifest all our magical future possibilities of a well-balanced life, a well-balanced world.

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Vita

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